NATION

Mukhtar Ansari laid to rest, thousands attend funeral

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

India's forex reserves rise by $140M to hit fresh peak

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Hyderabad's explosive form threatens Gujarat

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in www.magzter.com 31 MARCH 2024 |SUNDAY|BENGALURU| 20 RAMADAN, 1445 AH Vol 4 | Issue No 74| Pages: 8

WE ARE HIRING

SUB-EDITOR
WEB EDITOR

Journalism degree preferred but not essential

Applicants with maximum 2 years of experience preferred. Freshers are encouraged to apply

SEND YOUR CV TO

asma@salar.news
anushreeirwin@gmail.com

Prez confers Ratna on Rao, Charan Singh & 2 others

5 Bharat Ratnas were announced including 1 to LK Advani

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday conferred Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian honour, on former prime ministers PV Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh, agriculture scientist MS Swaminathan and two-time former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur, posthumously at a ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The awards to Rao, Singh, Thakur and Swaminathan were received by their kin.

PV Prabhakar Rao, the son of former Rao, received the award conferred on his father from the president. Jayant Chaudhary, Singh's grandson and chief of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), accepted the honour from Murmu.

This year, the government announced five Bharat Ratna awards, including one to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stalwart and former deputy prime minister L K Advani.

Rao, who was prime minister from 1991 to 1996 and often referred to as the Chanakya of Indian politics, is known for initiating far-reaching economic reforms and for his skilful political manoeuvring.

Narendra Modi greets PV Prabhakar Rao, son of. Narasimha Rao, after the latter received Bharat Ratna on behalf of his father during a ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhawan, in New Delhi on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

He was the first prime minister from the South, the first Congress leader from outside the Nehru-Gandhi family to complete a full five-year term and the man who steered India through the turbulent early 1990s.

Born in an agrarian family in Karimnagar district, now in Telangana, on 28 June, 1921, he was educated at the Osmania, Bombay and Nagpur Universities from where he earned his BSc and LLB degrees.

Chaudhary, a Jat leader from western Uttar Pradesh, was prime minister between 28 July, 1979 and 14 January, 1980. He died in 1987. Born on December 23, 1902, at Noorpur in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh in a middle-class family, Singh shifted to Meerut in 1929 and later joined the Congress.

After the Congress split, he became chief minister of Uttar Pradesh for the second time in February 1970 with the support of the Congress.

Considered the chief architect of land reforms in Uttar Pradesh, Singh had the reputation of being a hard taskmaster who would not tolerate inefficiency, nepotism and corruption in administration. Agricultural scientist MS Swaminathan, who died on 28 September, 2023, at the age of 98, is most widely known for transforming India from a drought-stricken country dependent on the United States for foodgrain imports in the 1960s to being declared self-sufficient in food production in 1971.

His efforts involved introducing high-yielding genetic varieties of rice and wheat in India and the subcontinent, alongside American agronomist Norman Borlaug. Swaminathan was awarded the first World Food Prize in 1987 for his work. Karpoori Thakur, popularly known as 'jannayak' (people's leader), served as Bihar chief minister from December 1970 to June 1971 and from December 1977 to April 1979. —*PTI*

SETTLES INTERNAL DIFFERENCES

Congress names KV Gowtham for Kolar LS seat

KOLAR, 30 MARCH

After days of intense debate over Kolar parliamentary seat in Karnataka, All India Congress Committee (AICC) on Saturday finally announced KV Gowtham as its candidate for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Earlier, a massive political drama erupted in Karnataka over the Kolar Lok Sabha ticket in Congress, wherein at least 5 MLAs, including a sitting minister, and 2 MLCs (Members of Legislative Council) threatened to resign from the party over reports that Kolar ticket was being given to Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa's family.

MLAs and MLC's alleged that the party distributes tickets within the family and said that since KH Muniyappa's daughter was already an MLA, the ticket should not go to another relative of the same family.

Meanwhile, Congress MP Randeep Singh Surjewala said Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy

KV Gowtham **PHOTO: ANI**

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar held a detailed deliberation with senior leader KH Muniyappa and party MLA's on the winning strategy for Kolar Parliament seat for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

He also stressed to build a consensus around a SC Left candidate for the Kolar parliament seat.

"Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, AICC general secretary KC Venugopal and I had separate and long discussion with KH Muniyappa emphasising the fact that in the interest of a winning strategy, we need to build a consensus around a SC Left candidate for Kolar Parliament," Surjewala said in a post on X. —*ANI*

Tamil actor Daniel Balaji dies of cardiac arrest at 48

CHENNAI, 30 MARCH

Actor Daniel Balaji, who worked primarily in Tamil films, has passed away at the age of 48 due to cardiac arrest. He died while going to a hospital in Chennai. His mortal remains are at his Purasaiwakkam home for the last rites. Born in December 1975, Daniel Balaji began his career as a unit production manager in Kamal Haasan's incomplete 'Marudhunayagam'. He made his acting debut on TV with a Tamil show, 'Chithi', in which he played the role of Daniel. His first film in Tamil was 'April Maadhathil'. —*ANI*

Rajnath to head BJP manifesto panel for LS polls

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

BJP on Saturday announced a 27-member committee, which included several Union ministers and chief ministers, headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to prepare its manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls. Rajnath Singh, a former party president, was the head of BJP's manifesto committee for the 2019 polls as well. Many members have been repeated in the current panel as well. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will be its convener and Union Minister Piyush Goyal co-convener. —*PTI*

NewsClick Founder named accused in 1st chargesheet

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Delhi Police on Saturday filed its first charge sheet, spread across about 8,000 pages, in the UAPA case against NewsClick and its founder Prabir Purkayastha for allegedly running Chinese propaganda, naming him and the firm owning the portal as accused. The final report was filed by the Delhi Police Special Cell before Additional Sessions Judge Hardeep Kaur. The chargesheet names Purkayastha and PPK NEWSCLICK Studio Private Limited as accused. —*PTI*

PROBED FOR 5 HRS

ED questions Delhi Min, says 'no info on Goa campaign'

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Delhi minister Kailash Gahlot on Saturday said he has told Enforcement Directorate that he had no information that Vijay Nair, the communications in-charge of AAP arrested earlier in the excise policy-linked money laundering case, was living in the government bungalow allotted to him.

He also said that he was not involved in Assembly polls in Goa. The minister, who was speaking after being questioned for nearly five hours by ED which had arrested Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on 21 March, asserted that there was no "scam" and that it would become clearer with time.

Sources said Gahlot was questioned with regard to the formulation of the excise policy for 2021-22 as he was part of the Group of }Ministers (GoM), along with former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and former urban development minister Satyendar Jain. Describing the practice of allowing the use of a government residence to someone else by a public servant as a "criminal breach of trust", ED had said it had asked Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to take action in the matter.

Kailash Gahlot **PHOTO: PTI**

Gahlot, who holds transport and other portfolios in the Delhi government, said that he never lived in his official accommodation and has told the agency he had no information that Nair used to live in that bungalow.

ED has alleged that the excise policy was leaked to the "South Group" liquor lobby that included Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader K Kavitha. AAP and its leaders have repeatedly denied the charges of wrongdoing, with Kejriwal alleging that the case was concocted by the BJP-led Centre to create a "smokescreen" that AAP is a corrupt party. —*PTI*

Paras supports NDA but no truce with Chirag

PATNA, 30 MARCH

Former Union minister Pashupati Kumar Paras on Saturday made it clear that he will "continue to support NDA" in the Lok Sabha polls but fell short of calling a truce with nephew Chirag Paswan.

Tagging Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP president JP Nadda and the party's Bihar in-charge Vinod Tawde, Paras wrote in Hindi, "Our Rashtriya

Pashupati Kumar **PHOTO: PTI**

Lok Janshakti Party is a part of NDA and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is our leader."

However, on Friday RJD, the largest Opposition party in Bihar, made it clear that it would field its own candidate from the reserved seat which late Paswan had represented several times and his son is contesting to drive home the point that he, and not Paras, was the true heir to his father's legacy.

BJP has been of the view that Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), headed by Chirag Paswan, on Saturday announced candidates for all five seats in Bihar it will be contesting as an NDA ally.

For the remaining three seats of Samastipur, Khagaria and Vaishali, the party will field Shambhavi Choudhary, Manish Verma and sitting MP Veena Devi, respectively, according to a statement issued by LJP (Ram Vilas). —*PTI*

In 8th list, BJP names ex-ambassador

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

BJP on Saturday named its candidates for 11 more Lok Sabha constituencies, fielding several leaders who joined it from different parties recently such as Bhartruhari Mahtab, Ravneet Singh Bittu, Sushil Kumar Rinku and Preneet Kaur.

All these leaders have been fielded from the seats they represent in the outgoing Lok Sabha, while former Indian ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu will be making his poll debut from Amritsar.

Hans Raj Hans, who had won from North West Delhi in 2019 on a BJP ticket, will contest from Faridkot seat, which is reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs).

Veteran parliamentarian Mahtab, who quit BJD recently, will contest from Cuttack, Bittu from Ludhiana, Kaur from Patiala, and Rinku from Jalandhar, a seat reserved for SCs. Both Bittu, the grandson of former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh, and Kaur, the wife of former Punjab CM Amarinder Singh, were in Congress before joining BJP, while Rinku was in Aam Aadmi Party.

Taranjit Singh Sandhu will be making his poll debut from Amritsar **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP on Sunday named two candidates from West Bengal, three from Odisha and six from Punjab.

It has so far announced its candidates for 411 seats. —*PTI*

- All these leaders have been fielded from the seats they represent in the outgoing Lok Sabha, while former Indian ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu will be making his poll debut from Amritsar.

250 LURED BY FAKE JOB IN CAMBODIA RESCUED: MEA

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Indian Embassy in Cambodia has been promptly responding to complaints from Indian nationals who were "lured" with employment opportunities in Cambodia but were forced to undertake illegal cyber work, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Saturday.

MEA said that it has rescued and repatriated about 250 Indians, 75 of which were in the past three months.

In a statement, MEA official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated, "Our Embassy in Cambodia has been promptly responding to complaints from Indian nationals who were lured with employment opportunities to that country but were forced to undertake illegal cyber work. —*ANI*

INDIA to hold rally for democracy & Kejri's arrest

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Congress on Saturday asserted that INDIA Opposition bloc's "Loktantra bachao rally" to be held at the Ramlila Maidan is aimed at saving the Constitution and democracy and not any particular person.

It said a "strong message" will be sent out from Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance's (INDIA) rally on Sunday to Lok Kalyan Marg (where the Prime Minister's residence is located) that BJP-led government's "time is up".

Addressing a press conference on the rally, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said party chief Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi will address the rally, among other senior leaders.

"It is not a person-specific rally. That is why it is called Loktantra Bachao Rally. This is not one party's rally, about 27-28 parties are involved in it. All constituents of INDIA janbandhan will be taking part in the rally," Ramesh said.

Speaking at the presser, AICC in-charge of Delhi Deepak Babaria said that the rally will have maximum participation and convey a message for saving the democracy and Constitution. Delhi Congress Chief Arvinder Singh Lovely, who also addressed the press conference, said the rally will mark the beginning of the decisive and final political assault on BJP from the people of the country. —*PTI*

ELITES DISLIKE POPULIST LEADERS

...but Modi has educated voters' support

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Elites may usually dislike populist leaders globally, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeing increasing support among educated voters, international publication The Economist has said.

In an article titled 'Why India's elites back Narendra Modi', the publication said, "Three factors -- class politics, economics, and elite admiration for strongman rule -- help explain why."

Calling it 'the Modi paradox', The Economist said India's Prime Minister is often lumped together with right-wing populists such as Donald Trump, but Modi, who is expected to win a third term, is no ordinary strongman.

Narendra Modi **PHOTO: PTI**

"In most places, support for anti-establishment populists, such as Trump, and policies such as Brexit tends to be inversely correlated with university education. Not in India. Call it the Modi paradox. It helps explain why he is the most popular leader of any major democracy today," it noted.

Citing a Pew Research survey, it said that in 2017, 66 per cent of Indians who had no more than a primary school education said they had a "very favourable" view of Modi, but the number rose to 80 per cent among Indians with at least some higher education. After the 2019 general election, a Lokniti survey found that around 42 per cent of Indians with a degree supported Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, while around 35 per cent of those with only a primary-school education did.

At the same time, The Economist said, Modi's success among the well-educated does not come at the expense of support among other groups. Like other populist leaders, his biggest inroads have been made among lower-class voters, it quoted Neelanjan Sircar, a political scientist at the Centre for Policy Research, as saying.

While the pattern of his support is comparable to other countries in which less-educated or rural people have shifted right, unlike many of his counterparts abroad, Modi has also been able to increase his support among the educated, it said. —*PTI*

Shah to launch poll campaign in State on 2 April

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will launch his Lok Sabha poll campaign in Karnataka from 2 April, BJP State general secretary V Sunil Kumar said on Saturday.Shah will hold a meeting with Bharatiya Janata Party and its ally Janata Dal (Secular) leaders at 9am on Tuesday. He will also hold a meeting with the party workers from Bengaluru North, Bengaluru South, Bengaluru Central, Bengaluru Rural and Chikkaballapur Lok Sabha constituencies at Palace Ground at 11am the same day. The Union minister will then hold a meeting with the senior leaders from Chikkaballapur, Tumakuru, Davangere and Chitradurga Lok Sabha constituencies. The home minister will hold a roadshow at Channapatna on 2 April evening, Kumar said. BJP has fielded its candidates at 25 Lok Sabha constituencies and left three other seats for its ally JD(S). Among its 25 candidates, BJP has fielded JD(S) patriarch and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda's son-in-law Dr CN Manjunath from Bengaluru Rural constituency against 3-time MP and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's brother DK Suresh. The elections in Karnataka will be held on 26 April and 7 May for 28 constituencies. —PTI

JD(S) leader Najma Chikkanerale joins Congress

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

With Lok Sabha elections just around the corner, Janata Dal (Secular) leader Najma Nazeer Chikkanerale on Saturday joined Congress party. Chikkanerale has joined the party along with her supporters, extending greetings and seeking blessings, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said in a post on X.

Chikkanerale, the former working president of the JD(S)' women's wing, joined the party as a worker at the age of 22 and quickly rose through the ranks. Within a year of joining, she became the State-level media spokesperson. At just 25 years old, she was appointed as the working president of the party's women's wing. —ANI

Section of Bannerghatta road to be closed

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

To facilitate the construction work of Lakkasandra Underground Metro station, Bannerghatta Main Road here will be closed from MICO signal up to Anepalya Junction for one year from 1 April, officials said on Saturday. Traffic moving on Bannerghatta Main Road intending to reach Anepalya Junction will have to take a right turn at MICO signal to reach Adugodi signal via BOSCH link road and take a left, Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited said. There is no deviation to the traffic moving towards Dairy Circle from Anepalya junction. "Motorists moving from Dairy Circle towards Shanthinagar have to take a left at 7th Main Road of Wilson Garden," it said. —PTI

50 acres of forest destroyed after miscreants' fire

C'NAGAR, 30 MARCH

More than 50 acres of forest in Bailur wildlife range of Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve were destroyed on Saturday after some miscreants set fire to the forest. The fire started near Kaulihalla Dam and efforts to douse the fire were underway, with a team of 60 personnel and officials, including a drone team, deployed at the site. However, the rugged terrain of the forest was presenting challenges to the firefighting operations, said BRT Deputy Conservator of Forests Deep J Contractor. "We will assess the extent of the damage once the ground fire is fully extinguished," he said. Preliminary investigations suggest that the fire was deliberately ignited by miscreants. The authorities are currently conducting inquiries to apprehend those responsible.—Salar News

Don't intimidate us with tax terrorism, says CM

'BJP afraid of losing polls & misusing central agencies'

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday said BJP is wrong if it thought that it could intimidate Congress party with "tax terrorism".

Reacting to Income Tax Department's fresh notice to the party asking to pay Rs 1,823 crore, Siddaramaiah alleged that BJP is afraid of losing the Lok Sabha elections and hence "terrorising" the party by misusing central agencies. "As part of this tactic, they have unleashed tax terrorism on our party. BJP is under the illusion that by weakening our party, it can win the election," Siddaramaiah said.

Quoting Congress leaders, the Chief Minister said between 2017 and 2018, BJP obtained contributions from 92 undisclosed donors and 1,297 donors lacking address details. "Should the same criteria (of raising tax demand) be applied to BJP, it would be liable to pay Rs 4,263 crore for tax discrepancies over the last seven years," Siddaramaiah said.

He said Income Tax Department has become "hyperactive", using tax terrorism as a tool against Opposition parties, including, TMC and CPI, as the election approaches.

However, the same I-T Department, which aggressively targets Opposition parties, mysteriously turns a blind eye to the BJP's tax violations. The public is not so ignorant as to not question who is blindfolding the I-T Department, the Chief Minister said.

"The I-T Department, which levies accusations of tax violations against certain Congress leaders citing supposed diary entries, overlooks the Yediyurappa diaries exposed in Karnataka, as well as the 'Birla-Sahara' diary that suggests Narendra Modi was a beneficiary. Why have these not caught the department's attention?" Siddaramaiah asked.

He alleged that the ruling BJP has misappropriated thousands of crores through electoral bonds, misusing institutions like IT, ED, and CBI. However, now, to divert the people's attention from this huge scam, the BJP government is making false accusations of income tax evasion with the malicious intention of portraying the Opposition parties as guilty, the Chief Minister charged.

"In the past five years, the BJP government has written off around Rs 10.09 lakh crore of bank loans of fraudsters like Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi. The public deserves to know how many kickbacks the BJP received from these individuals," Siddaramaiah claimed.

—Salar News and Agencies

Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: PTI**

- Reacting to Income Tax Department's fresh notice to the party asking to pay Rs 1,823 crore, Siddaramaiah alleged that BJP is afraid of losing the Lok Sabha elections and hence "terrorising" the party by misusing central agencies. "As part of this tactic, they have unleashed tax terrorism on our party. BJP is under the illusion that by weakening our party, it can win the election," Siddaramaiah said.

NO TICKET FOR LS POLLS

Sumalatha to take decision on 3 April

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Mandya sitting MP Sumalatha Ambareesh on Saturday said she would announce her decision on the upcoming election on 3 April, given that she was not renominated and NDA constituents BJP and JD(S) decided to field HD Kumaraswamy from her constituency.

The multi-lingual film actress-turned-politician convened a meeting of her supporters at her Bengaluru residence to decide her future course of action, with the change in political scenario. Addressing her supporters, she said, "It is my duty to keep the voters of Mandya informed about any of my decisions."

Sumalatha won the 2019 Lok Sabha election as an independent candidate with the BJP's backing and defeated Nikhil Kumaraswamy, the grandson of former prime minister and JD(S) patriarch HD Deve Gowda and son of former chief minister Kumaraswamy. However, the Janata Dal (Secular) is now BJP's ally, and Kumaraswamy will be contesting the election as the NDA candidate.

To pacify Sumalatha, BJP State President and Yediyurappa's son BY Vijayendra called on her on Friday but Sumalatha said she would consult her supporters on Saturday before taking a final call.

After the meeting with her supporters on Saturday, she told them that her political career had begun with their blessings. She also praised the fans of her husband and eminent Kannada film actor-turned-politician late Ambareesh, who stood by her. "I have people on the stage who have been supporting Ambareesh for the past 30 years. They shared their pain with me. They were those who gave me confidence to fight the election though I did not have any political experience," Sumalatha said. Sumalatha was expecting a BJP ticket and had met all the BJP central leaders. *—PTI*

IN MAHADEVAPURA

Cong candidate interacts with party members

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Congress candidate for Bengaluru Central constituency Mansoor Ali Khan interacted with ward-level members of Congress in Mahadevapura on Saturday as part of preparations for Lok Sabha elections.

Former minister H Nagesh, KPCC general secretaries G Shekar and Aga Sultan, Bengaluru East DCC President K Nanda Kumar, former corporator and KPCC general secretary Uday Kumar were part of the interaction. The election convention was also attended by Zilla Parishad member Mullur Shekar, MCC Ravi, former president of OBC cell Gopal, Sudhakar Reddy, former panchayat president Ram Krishnappa, Block Presidents Babu Gowda, VTB Babu and Sunil Kumar, Marathahalli Block Mahila Congress President Vanaja Reddy, Block SC President Muniraj, OBC Cell President Devraj, former Minority and Youth Cell leader Basavaraj. The cadres of OBC, Minority, Labour and Youth Cells in Mahadevapura zone too were part of the meeting.

—Salar News

Woman steals laptops from PGs, arrested

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Bengaluru police have arrested a 29-year-old woman from Rajasthan for allegedly stealing laptops from multiple paying guest accommodations across the City since 2022.

According to Bengaluru Police Commissioner, B Dayananda, "The woman identified as Jassu Agarwal was arrested with 24 laptops worth Rs 10 lakh."

Sharing details about the thefts, Police Commissioner said, "A laptop, charger and mouse were stolen from a rented house under the HAL police station and a case was registered at the HAL police station in October last year."

The theft included 3 laptop cases of 1 HAL station each from Koramangala and Indiranagar.

As per details, the Rajasthan woman used to conduct the robberies in paying guests (PG) around software company localities and PG areas of the City such as Tin Factory, Marathahalli, Bellandur, Silkboard Hebbala, Whitefield, Mahadevpur, etc.

The stolen laptops were being sold to laptop shops in Marathahalli, Yalahanka and Hebbal by the accused, said the official. *—ANI*

CONG WILL BREAK APART IN STATE AFTER LS POLLS: BOMMAI

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai on Saturday said Congress will break apart in the State after Lok Sabha elections as the party is unable to find suitable candidates and has given the tickets to family members of the ministers.

"Congress will get divided within three months in Karnataka after Narendra Modi takes oath as the Prime Minister for the third time," he said.

Bommai said dynasty politics has been a hallmark of Congress but this time giving more tickets to the kith and kin of the ministers is for a different reason. "The high command had asked ten ministers to contest the parliamentary polls but they were not confident that they would win. When the central leaders asked them to suggest suitable candidates, they got the tickets for their sons, daughters, son-in-law, daughter-in-law and brother. This would not benefit the party as the voters have decided to vote for Modi," Bommai said. *—Salar News*

BJP LEADER TEJASWINI GOWDA JOINS CONG AHEAD OF LS POLLS

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Days after resigning as an MLC in Karnataka, BJP's Tejaswini Gowda joined Congress on Saturday and alleged that the saffron party does not believe in constitutional and democratic values.

Gowda, who was a Congress MP between 2004 and 2009, and crossed over to BJP in 2014, called her return to the grand old party her "homecoming". She was inducted into the Congress in the presence of party general secretary Jairam Ramesh and media and publicity department head Pawan Khera at its headquarters here.

Gowda said, "The Congress believes in action and not just words. History is there for us to see. It's high time, and with all sincerity, I would like to work for the party. The BJP does not believe in constitutional democratic values."

—PTI

Bengaluru among top 3 cities for idli orders in the country

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai emerged as the top three cities in the country where idlis are ordered the most, followed closely by Mumbai, Pune, Coimbatore, Delhi, Vizag, Kolkata and Vijayawada, said food aggregator Swiggy on Saturday on the occasion of 'World Idli Day'.The top five restaurants famous for their idlis are Asha Tiffins in Bengaluru, A2B Adyar Ananda Bhavan in Bengaluru and Chennai, Varalakshmi Tiffins in Hyderabad, Sree Akshayam in Chennai, and Veena Stores in Bengaluru, according to the online food delivery platform. The peak time for ordering idlis is between 8am and 10am, with consumers from Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Coimbatore and Mumbai also savouring the delicacy during dinner time, the company said.The plain idli emerged as the most popular variant across all cities, with a plate of two pieces being the most common order. "Rava idli is popular in Bengaluru, while ghee/neyi karam podi idli is favoured in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Thatte idli and mini idli also find regular spots among idli orders across cities," Swiggy said. Idlis ranked as the second-most ordered breakfast item on the platform, following closely behind masala dosa.

—Salar News

Saina Nehwal **PHOTO: PTI**

SAINA NEHWAL HITS OUT AT CONG MLA FOR SEXIST REMARKS

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Star shuttler Saina Nehwal on Saturday lashed out at Shamanur Shivashankarappa, veteran Congress leader from the state, for making "sexist jibe" at Gayatri Siddeshwara, a BJP candidate from Davangere constituency. Shivashankarappa, a 92-year-old sitting MLA from Davangere south, had said Gayatri "belonged to the kitchen".

Nehwal posted on her X account: "Women should be restricted to the kitchen this is what a top Karnataka leader Shamanur Shivashankarappa ji has said. The sexist jibe at @bjp4india candidate from Davanagere, Gayatri Siddeshwara ji is least expected from a party that says Ladki Hoon Lad Sakti Hoon."

—ANI

SEVA DAL MEETING

KPCC President DK Shivakumar being greeted by MLC MR Seetharam, Chikkaballapur Congress candidate Raksha Ramaiah and Seva Dal Working President Tanveer Sait at a meeting with Seva Dal workers regarding Lok Sabha elections, in Bengaluru on Saturday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

LOK SABHA POLLS

Student organisations release manifesto

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Federation of Student Organisations, Karnataka, in a significant move, unveiled 'Student-Youth Manifesto: Lok Sabha Elections 2024' on 30 March, 2024.

A coalition of student leaders from various organisations, including Students Islamic Organisation (SIO), Dalita Vidyarthi Parishad, and Aratrika All India Students' Association, presented a comprehensive set of demands aimed at education and employment reforms.

In a joint press conference, the student leaders emphasised the critical role of the youth in shaping the political landscape and called upon political parties to address pressing issues affecting the student and youth community.

Srinath Pujari, State President of Dalita Vidyarthi Parishad, highlighted the need for effective implementation of the Right to Education Act and increased funding for education. The manifesto calls for measures to address unemployment and underemployment among the youth.

Sarovar Benkikere, KVS State President, emphasised the need for job creation initiatives, stating, "Unemployment rates among the youth are alarming. Political parties must prioritise the creation of sustainable employment opportunities to secure the future of our nation."

With the release of the 'Student-Youth Manifesto,' Karnataka's student organisations have set the stage for a dialogue between political parties and the youth, emphasising the need for substantive action on education and employment fronts.

As the Lok Sabha elections approach, all eyes are on political parties to heed the call of the student-youth community and prioritizs their demands for a brighter future.

—Salar News

State BJP starts 'Thank you Modi' campaign

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

BJP State unit has started a 40-day 'Thank you Modi' campaign on Saturday to highlight projects sanctioned by Narendra Modi-led Central government to Karnataka, said BJP State General Secretary and MLA V Sunil Kumar.

Modi-led BJP government has made huge contributions to Karnataka during the past decade. "Recognizing the contributions to the State, we will introduce one or two projects sanctioned to the State every day through a video and thank Modi for it over the next 40 days," Kumar said.

"Every project of Modi was intended to bring benefits to the State and we want Modi to come back to power so that more such helpful initiatives are given to the State, Kumar said. The video on Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana was released on Saturday. "More than 10 crore people, including 4.70 lakh in the State, benefited from the scheme," Kumar said. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Central Excise checks Kerala roads for election freebies

KOCHI, 30 MARCH

All Central Excise divisions in Kerala are carrying out patrolling on the roads to check for black money and election freebies in connection with the coming Lok Sabha polls in the state on 26 April, a Customs official said. Central Excise and Customs officers from the Cochin Headquarters Anti-Evasion Flying Squad and all divisions in the state will be carrying out the checking till election day, the official said. The operation is being carried out as part of the Preventive Vigilance Mechanism in connection with the LS polls, he said. A special team has also been constituted by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) for this purpose, the official said.
—PTI

Cong's ex-min's daughter-in-law joins BJP

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

Archana Patil, daughter-in-law of senior Congress leader and former Union home minister Shivraj Patil, joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Saturday. She joined the ruling party in the presence of Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and BJP's state president Chandrakant Bawankule. Fadnavis said Patil joining the BJP will boost the party's prospects in Latur and Marathwada region.
—PTI

Security forces hold flag marches across Kashmir

SRINAGAR, 30 MARCH

The security forces conducted flag marches across Kashmir Valley on Saturday to instil a sense of security and confidence among the voters ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, officials said. The officials said the flag marches were conducted by the district police and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) across the valley. The flag marches were conducted in view of the upcoming parliamentary elections, they said. The officials said the flag marches are a part of area domination exercise to instil a sense of security and harmony in the society and to ensure free, fair and fearless elections. The senior officers of the police and CAPFs, and jawans took part in the flag marches. There are three Lok Sabha seats in Kashmir -- Anantnag-Rajouri, Srinagar and Baramulla. While Anantnag-Rajouri goes to polls in the third phase on 7 May, polling in Srinagar will be held in phase four on 13 May and Baramulla in phase five on 20 May.
—PTI

Cong releases 40 star campaigners list for Ch'garh

RAIPUR, 30 MARCH

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, senior leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra are among the Opposition party's 40 star campaigners for the Lok Sabha polls in Chhattisgarh. The list of star campaigners was shared on Saturday by the state unit of Congress. Others on the list include the party's state in charge Sachin Pilot, Rajani Patil and three Chief Ministers, namely Siddaramaiah (Karnataka), Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu (Himachal Pradesh) and Revanth Reddy (Telangana). Haryana leader Kumari Selja, actor-turned-politician Raj Babbar, Odisha leader Bhakta Charan Das, poet and Rajya Sabha MP Imran Pratapgarhi and former student leader Kanhaiya Kumar have also been named as star campaigners. Naxal-hit Bastar (ST) will be the lone seat to witness polling in the first phase on 19 April, while three other constituencies will vote on 26 April.
—PTI

Demand for ban on projects in Himalayas gets louder

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

More than 60 environmental and social organisations in the country have demanded a complete ban on all mega infrastructure projects, such as those related to the railways, dams, hydro projects and four-lane highways in the Himalayas, and have urged for referendums and public consultations to be made compulsory for all development projects.

The organisations, jointly leading the "People for Himalaya" campaign, issued a five-point charter of demand for all political parties for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls during an online press conference. They called for a complete moratorium on all mega infrastructure projects, including those related to the railways, dams, hydro projects, tunnelling, transmission lines and four-lane highways, along with a comprehensive multidisciplinary review of the impacts of the existing projects.

The organisations demanded that democratic decision-making through referendums and public consultations be made compulsory for large infrastructure projects. They also called for the strengthening of the Environment Impact Assessment Notification-1994, the scrapping of the EIA-2020 amendments and FCA-2023 amendments, and free prior informed consent of gram sabhas for all development projects.

Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk said, "While industries exploit the riches of the Himalayas, the local people bear the brunt of disasters. The government uses taxpayers' money for rehabilitation efforts, yet those who reap the benefits are not held accountable."

Organisations have urged for referendums to be complusory PHOTO: PTI

- The organisations demanded that democratic decision-making through referendums and public consultations be made compulsory for projects

Wangchuk, who recently went on a 21-day fast to demand that Ladakh be included under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, said, "Bureaucrats from Chandigarh or Lucknow may not fully understand the fragility of the region. The best of all could also make mistakes and the worst of all would sell it off to industries."

Mohan Saikia from the Northeast Dialogue Forum warned of severe ecological impacts of massive hydropower development proposed on the Brahmaputra river and its basins, without the consent of the local indigenous communities. "The far-reaching impact of these infrastructure projects is manifested in the form of floods," Saikia said.

Guman Singh from the Himalaya Niti Abhiyan and Atul Sati of the Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti said the Beas floods and the land subsidence in Joshimath are "man-made, policy-led disasters".

Vimla Vishwapremi of the Parvatiya Mahila Adhikar Manch, Himachal Pradesh said pastoralists, landless Dalits and women, who contribute the least to these policy disasters and the climate crisis, are the worst hit. "They remain invisible and lack support when it comes to rebuilding their lives," she said.
—PTI

Govt pressuring judiciary on electoral bonds: Priyanka

She says Centre does not approve of independent judiciary

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday accused Centre of "pressuring" the judiciary after Supreme Court struck down the electoral bonds scheme and wondered whether Narendra Modi government does not approve of an independent and strong judiciary.

Congress general secretary's remarks come two days after Modi criticised the grand old party in reaction to more than 600 lawyers writing to the Chief Justice of India, alleging that a "vested interest group" is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts.

Modi on Thursday said it was a "vintage Congress culture" to browbeat and bully others.

In a post in Hindi on X, Priyanka Gandhi said, "The manner in which the judicial system is being pressured by getting letters written after seeing the layers of scams being exposed by a decision of the Supreme Court on electoral bonds (which the public is calling 'extortion racket'), and then Prime Minister himself entering the arena and making negative comments on the judiciary, shows that there is something fishy."

"And there is something about which he himself is probably nervous," she said.

Congress General secretary Priyanka Gandhi accuses Narendra Modi-led BJP government of putting pressure on the "judicial system PHOTO: PTI

"Troubled by political interference, Supreme Court judges holding press conferences, sending a judge to Rajya Sabha, fielding a (former) judge as a candidate in elections, trying to control the appointment of judges and commenting on the judiciary when decisions are against them Does Modiji's government not approve of an independent and strong judiciary?" Priyanka Gandhi said.

More than 600 lawyers, including senior advocate Harish Salve and Bar Council chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra, have written to Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, alleging that a "vested interest group" was trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts, especially in cases of corruption involving politicians.

CJI Chandrachud's leadership is crucial in these "tough times" and the apex court should stand strong, they said, adding it is not the time to maintain a dignified silence.

The letter, shared by official sources, targeted a section of lawyers without naming them and alleged that they defend politicians by day and then try to influence judges through the media at night.
—PTI

Priyanka slams govt over 'rising debt'

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra slammed the BJP-led Centre on Saturday over its proposal to borrow more than Rs 14 lakh crore, asking why is the government "drowning the people in debt" when instead of relief being provided to them, the "burden of unemployment, inflation and economic crisis" is increasing. In her budget speech last month, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed to borrow Rs 14.13 lakh crore by issuing dated securities to meet a revenue shortfall in the next financial year starting 1 April.
—PTI

'ARROGANCE OF OPPN PARTY'

Congress protests over IT notices; BJP reacts

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Congress on Saturday held protests in many states against fresh notices from the income tax department for payment of Rs 1,823 crore and said it would not be intimidated by the Centre's "tax terrorism", but the BJP accused the Opposition of misleading the country after committing "tax fraud" and asserted that no one is above law.

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said he was shocked after he received an income tax notice last night though the case against him was a "settled matter" and alleged that the department was turning a blind eye to tax violations involving BJP leaders.

In the national capital, Indian Youth Congress (IYC) members led by its president Srinivas BV were stopped from marching to Rajendra Prasad Road by police and detained. Under the guise of tax rules, the Congress is being harassed, Srinivas alleged. The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) organised a protest in front of the Income Tax department office in Thiruvananthapuram.

BJP alleged that the Congress' reaction reflected its "arrogance" and asked if there should be a separate law for the opposition party.

PHOTO: PTI

Congress would come down to a single-digit tally in this Lok Sabha elections as it is trying to "mislead" the people on the issue of income tax notices after indulging in "tax fraud", the ruling party claimed. "Congress is still arrogant due to its six-decade rule. If other political parties are honouring IT laws, why not Congress," Union minister Anurag Thakur said in Jammu.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters in Delhi, party national spokesperson Syed Zafar Islam alleged that Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and other leaders of the party are trying to "threaten" the Income Tax Department with their remarks.
—PTI

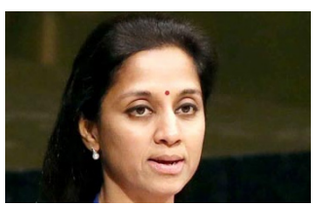
Pawar vs Pawar: NCP fields Sunetra against Supriya Sule in Baramati

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

Nationalist Congress Party on Saturday declared the candidature of Sunetra Pawar, wife of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, from Baramati Lok Sabha seat, pitting her against sister-in-law and Sharad Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule from the home turf of Pawars.

The announcement of her candidature was made by Maharashtra NCP unit president Sunil Tatkare, hours after NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) declared its first list of five candidates for Lok Sabha elections from Maharashtra.

NCP (SP) retained Supriya Sule from Baramati and fielded Nilesh Lanke, who switched sides from the Ajit Pawar camp, from Ahmednagar constituency. Tatkare said the battle in Baramati is of ideology and principles, and not a family one. Earlier in the day, Shiv Sena leader Vijay Shivtare, a fierce critic of Ajit Pawar, decided against contesting from Baramati in upcoming elections, dropping his belligerent stand.



Sunetra Pawar and Supriya Sule PHOTO: PTI

With Sunetra Pawar, a novice in electoral politics, in the field, Baramati is set to witness a first-of-its-kind Pawar versus Pawar battle, post the split in the party founded by the Pawar senior in 1999.

The real fight lies between Ajit Pawar, who joined Shiv Sena-led Maharashtra government last July, and his uncle Sharad Pawar, a wily and battle-hardened politician.

NCP (SP), , also comprising Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress, will contest 10 seats in Maharashtra, which sends 48 members to Lok Sabha.
—PTI

NCP(SP) PLAINT AGAINST SENA, BJP CAMPAIGNERS

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

Sharad Pawar camp on Saturday said it has filed a complaint with Election Commission against the ruling BJP and Shiv Sena for violating the Representation of the People Act and poll code by publishing the names of individuals from other parties as their star campaigners.

NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) is part of the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Maharashtra, also comprising Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress.

Voting for Lok Sabha elections is scheduled to start on 19 April. Maharashtra will vote in five phases.

The party demanded strict action by ECI in the interest of protecting the sanctity of free and fair elections.
—PTI

BJP plans to remove Mumbai slums: Aaditya

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Saturday accused BJP of hatching a plan to forcibly remove slums from Mumbai and relocate those living in them to salt-pan lands.

Addressing a news conference, Thackeray latched on to the remarks of Union Minister Piyush Goyal, BJP candidate from Mumbai North Lok Sabha seat. In an interaction with a media house, Goyal had said if elected, he intends to pursue a project that would entirely clear his constituency, which comprises northern suburbs like Malad, Kandivali and Borivli, of slums.

Goyal had welcomed the idea of salt pan lands in Mumbai to be redistributed for slum rehabilitation. "This is a very dangerous scheme. Those who live in slums have their livelihood around that place. We will not allow them (BJP) to go ahead with their plan to relocate slums to saltpans," Thackeray said.

Thackeray said it is the people of Mumbai who will decide on relocation and not the Centre.

He said when the Maha Vikas Aghadi government sought salt pan land for the metro rail car shed project, Centre denied permission.

However, the same salt-pans are not now being used to rehabilitate slum dwellers, he added.
—PTI

Cong taunts BJP over CBI's clean chit to Praful

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Displaying a washing machine on its press conference dais, Congress on Saturday taunted BJP over CBI filing a closure report in a 2017 corruption case against NCP leader Praful Patel and said the ruling party's "fully automatic washing machine" works on the principle -- "join BJP, case closed".

Congress raised the issue of leaders, against whom there have been corruption charges, joining or aligning with BJP only to see "the cases against them being closed", an allegation often levelled by Opposition parties.

The party warned it will "go after every single officer" of agencies "who has willingly become a party to undermining our democracy and our Constitution".

Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera's press conference at AICC headquarters on Saturday was all about symbolism, with a "BJP washing machine' kept on the table and a demonstration of a "dirty T-shirt" with "corruption, fraud, scam" written on it going into the machine and a clean T-shirt with "BJP Modi wash" written on it coming out of it.

In keeping with the flavour of the press conference, Khera alleged that the "BJP machine costs over Rs 8,500 crore" - the money the ruling party got through electoral bonds - and it is effective in cleaning all types of stains of corruption when used with "Modi washing powder".

He claimed that there are at least 21 major leaders who have been whitewashed "clean" after BJP made allegations of corruption and illegality against them.
—PTI

SAY 1ST TIME VOTERS

'Voting is a right & responsibility'

ITANAGAR, 30 MARCH

For many first-time voters in Arunachal Pradesh voting is not just a right but a responsibility also for building a strong base for a vibrant democracy. First-time voters in Arunachal Pradesh constitute 46,144 of the total 8,82,816 electorate. Voting for the two Lok Sabha constituencies and the 60-member Arunachal Pradesh Assembly will be held simultaneously on 19 April.

Eighteen-year-old Millo Sunyo who will vote for the first time said: "Voting is not just a right but a responsibility of all eligible voters to exercise their adult franchise for building a strong base for a vibrant democracy". Sunya, who hails from Ziro-Hapoli Assembly constituency, said people, especially new voters, should turn out in good numbers as it is essential for a healthy democratic process.

Arunchal Pradesh constitutes 46,144 first time voters PHOTO: PTI

"Many a time, we criticise the government but skip participating in the voting process," said 23-year-old Mingo Ete, who hails from Aalo in West Siang district, and will exercise his franchise for the first time. Eighteen-year-old Gedo Kato, who will vote for the first time in the Assembly and Parliamentary polls from Liromoba constituency, said, "I am not interested in politics."
—PTI

CONG WILL USHER IN 'ROZGAR KRANTI': KHARGE

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Congress will usher in a 'Rozgar Kranti' by taking concrete steps to increase employment opportunities, enable entrepreneurship and realise the aspirations of the youth, party chief Mallikarjun Kharge said on Saturday.

He said the Congress guarantees that the future of youth will turn from bleak to bright and reiterated the 'Yuva Nyay' guarantees which the party would implement if voted to power.

In a post on X, he said, "The Congress party will usher in a 'Rozgar Kranti (employment revolution)' through Yuva Nyay guarantee! We will take concrete measures to increase employment opportunities, enable entrepreneurship and realise the dreams and aspirations of our youth."
—PTI

PHOTO: PIXABAY

LPG cylinder blast kills woman, her 3 kids in UP

DEORIA, 30 MARCH

In a tragic incident, a 42-year-old woman and her three children were killed after an LPG cylinder exploded in a village of this Uttar Pradesh district on Saturday, police said. The incident occurred around 4am in Dumri village located within the Bhaluani police station limits, they said. The cylinder exploded when tea was being prepared by Aarti Devi, police said.Senior officials arrived in the village after the incident and the bodies were sent for post-mortem, they said, adding that forensic and fire department teams are also at the spot. Shivshankar Gupta, the deceased woman's husband, was getting ready to step out of the house and tea was being prepared when the cylinder exploded, police said.Besides Aarti, the couple's daughters – Aanchal,14, and Srishti,11, -- and son Kundan,12, were killed, they added. *—PTI*

3 members of PFI held in money laundering case

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Three alleged members of the banned Popular Front of India (PFI) have been arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on money-laundering charges, official sources said on Saturday.Abdul Khader Puttur, Anshad Baddrudin and Firoz K were working as physical trainers for the PFI, the sources said, adding that they were arrested under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).The arrested accused were produced before a special court here on Saturday. The agency has accused the three men of "imparting" weapons training to the PFI cadre and receiving substantial funds from the proscribed organisation for the same. *—PTI*

Mentally disabled minor girl raped in UP's Muzaffarnagar

MUZAFFARNAGAR , 30 MARCH

A 14-year-old mentally challenged girl was allegedly raped here by a youth, police said on Saturday.SP (Rural) Aditya Bansal said that in the complaint given to the police by the girl's family, it was alleged that the accused, who also belongs to the same village, took her to a nearby field on Friday in a village under the Titawi police station area, where she was raped. On the basis of the complaint, police have registered a case against accused Sachin under various sections of the IPC and POCSO Act, and he was arrested on Saturday. The girl has been sent for medical examination, Bansal added. *—PTI*

Man kills live-in partner for forcing to marry her

PALGHAR, 30 MARCH

A 22-year-old woman was allegedly strangulated to death by her live-in partner in Palghar district of Maharashtra for insisting to marry him, with the police arresting the accused from West Bengal days later, an official said. The crime came to light on 15 March after the woman's decomposed body was found in a room that they had rented in Dahanu town of Palghar district, he said on Friday. The 26-year-old accused, Minazuddin Abdul Ajij Mulla alias Ravindra Reddy, was arrested on 22 March from South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, from where he and the victim hailed, the police official said. Addressing media on Friday, District Superintendent of Police Balasaheb Patil said, "The woman, Anisha Barasta Khatun, was found dead on in a room located in a chawl at Dahanu. *—PTI*

Mukhtar Ansari laid to rest, thousands attend funeral

Police faced a tough time managing crowd at burial ground

GHAZIPUR/LUCKNOW, 30 MARCH

People gather during the funeral procession of gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari, in Ghazipur on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

- Ansari, a five-time MLA from Mau Sadar, was interred at his family's ancestral burial ground, near his parents' graves. According to family sources the body was brought to his hometown around midnight on Friday

Gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari was laid to rest in Ghazipur on Saturday amid a blanket of security as a large crowd took part in the funeral procession while a few people tried to forcibly enter the burial ground, giving tough time to police personnel trying to maintain order.

Some people in the procession raised slogans while an argument broke out between Ghazipur District Magistrate Aryaka Akhoury and Mukhtar's brother Afzal Ansari after the administration, in an attempt to manage the crowd, allegedly stopped some from entering the Kali Bagh burial ground to offer soil on the grave as part of rituals.

Ansari, a five-time MLA from Mau Sadar, was interred at his family's ancestral burial ground, near his parents' graves. According to family sources, the body was brought to his hometown around midnight on Friday and pre-burial rituals took place at their residence.

The 63-year-old had been behind bars in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab since 2005 and had over 60 criminal cases against him. He died on Thursday night at Rani Durgawati Medical College after being taken there from Banda jail when his health deteriorated.

Local police said thousands of people from Ghazipur district and nearby areas turned up to attend the last rites. Despite elaborate security arrangements outside Ansari's residence and the graveyard, police faced a tough time managing the crowd as some people tried to force their way into the burial ground where entry was restricted.

The funeral procession took longer than expected to reach the burial ground in Mohammadabad because of the large crowd that accompanied the body, said Ravindra Singh, a local.

According to local sources, there was a heated exchange of words between the district magistrate and Afzal Ansari, an MP, during the burial rituals.

A video purportedly of the incident surfaced on social media platforms in which Afzal Ansari can be heard saying, "You cannot stop anyone from offering soil." To this, the district magistrate replied, "Family members can offer soil. Will the entire town offer soil?"

Not just from the town, anyone from anywhere who wants to offer soil will do so, retorted Afzal Ansari as seen in the clip. When the Akhoury asked if any permission had been sought for the same and cited the prohibitory orders imposed in the district, Ansari said, "You cannot stop anyone from participating in a burial despite the imposition of CrPC section 144."

The District Magistrate went on to say that videography is being done and legal action will be taken.Following the death of Mukhtar Ansari, prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), which bars large gatherings, were imposed across the state and additional security personnel were deployed in the Banda, Mau, Ghazipur and Varanasi districts.Ansari, who hailed from Mau, was believed to have a strong influence in the adjoining Ghazipur and Varanasi districts as well. *—PTI*

MONEY-LAUNDERING PROBE

The agency has sought prosecution of the accused and informed that it might file supplementary complaints in the future *PHOTO: ANI*

Delhi: ED files 1st chargesheet in Jal Board case

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed its first chargesheet in connection with a money-laundering probe linked to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), official sources said on Saturday.

The about-8,000-page-long prosecution complaint, that includes 140 operational pages apart from annexures, was filed by the federal agency before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Delhi on 28 March, the sources told PTI.

The court has listed the matter for 1 April for taking cognisance of the chargesheet, they said.

Four individuals and a company have been named as the accused in the chargesheet -- former DJB chief engineer Jagdish Kumar Arora, contractor Anil Kumar Agarwal, former NBCC general manager DK Mittal, one Tejinder Singh and NKG Infrastructure Limited.

The agency has sought prosecution of these accused under the PMLA and informed that it might file supplementary complaints in the future.

The ED has alleged that bribe money generated from corruption in a contract issued by the DJB was "passed on" as election funds to the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi. The agency had also summoned Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for questioning in the case, but he did not depose before it.

A First Information ReportFIR lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which accuses Arora of awarding a DJB contract to NKG Infrastructure Limited for a total cost of Rs 38 crore despite the fact that the company "did not meet" the technical eligibility criteria, is the basis of the ED case. The ED arrested Arora and Agarwal in the case on 31 January.

NKG Infrastructure Limited bagged the contract by submitting "forged" documents and Arora "was aware of the fact that the company does not meet the technical eligibility", the agency has claimed. *—PTI*

12 HOUR-LONG OP

Indian Navy frees hijacked Iranian ship, rescues 23 Pak crew

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

The fishing vessel was approximately 90nm (nautical miles) southwest of Socotra when the pirates reportedly boarded it *PHOTO: PTI*

The Indian Navy has freed an Iranian fishing vessel that was hijacked by pirates and rescued its crew of 23 Pakistani nationals, following "intense coercive tactical measures" as part of an anti-piracy operation at sea that lasted for more than 12 hours, officials said.

Following Friday's operation, specialist teams from the Navy undertook a thorough sanitisation and seaworthiness check of the fishing vessel in order to escort it to a safe area for resuming normal fishing activities, according to an official statement shared by a Navy spokesperson.

The Navy said late on Friday evening that it was engaged in an operation to free the fishing vessel from pirates. Nine armed pirates had reportedly boarded the vessel.

The hijacked vessel was intercepted on Thursday, the Navy said.

"INS Sumedha intercepted FV 'Al Kambar' during early hours of Friday and was joined subsequently by the guided missile frigate INS Trishul," it said.

The fishing vessel was approximately 90nm (nautical miles) southwest of Socotra when the pirates reportedly boarded it, it said.

The Indian Navy said it remains committed to ensuring maritime security in the region and the safety of seafarers, "irrespective of the nationalities,

The Navy will take "affirmative action" to ensure a safer and more secure Indian Ocean Region, its chief, Admiral R Hari Kumar, told a press conference on 23 March while citing the anti-piracy and other maritime security operations undertaken by the naval force in the preceding 100 days under "Op Sankalp". *—PTI*

MUMBAI: ATS NABS 5 B'DESHIS OVER ILLEGAL STAY

THANE, 30 MARCH

Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) has arrested five Bangladeshi nationals from Navi Mumbai for staying in the country without valid documents, officials said on Saturday.

The operation was conducted at two locations in Ghansoli by the Vikhroli unit (Mumbai) of the ATS on Friday.

"Acting on a tip-off, the ATS led the operation and arrested five Bangladeshis, who were found living in India without valid documents. They were nabbed from Janai Compound and near Shivaji Talao, both in Ghansoli," a police official said.

The accused, Aahat Jamal Sheikh, 22, Rebul Samad Sheikh, 40, Ronney Soriful Khan, 25, Julu Billal Sharif, 28 and Mohammad Munir Mohammad Siraj Mulla, 49, hail from two districts in Bangladesh and were employed as masons in Navi Mumbai. *—PTI*

168 roads closed as snow, rain lash HP

SHIMLA, 30 MARCH

Higher reaches and tribal areas received fresh spell of snow while low and middle hills were lashed by intermittent hail and rains on Saturday as the local MeT office predicted wet spell in Himachal Pradesh till 4 April.

A Himachal Roadways Transport Corporation (HRTC) bus turned turtle near Maling in the Kinnaur district after skidding on Saturday morning in the snow but no casualty was reported, an official said.

Traffic came to a halt at the Atal Tunnel in Rohtang near Manali following heavy snow. Kalpa and Kukumseri received 5cm of snow followed by Keylong with 3cm of snow in the past 24 hours.

A total of 168 roads, including three National Highways, were closed for vehicular traffic in the state on Friday night as per the data of the state emergency operation centre. Most of these roads are in a difficult terrain in Lahaul and Spiti, where 159 roads are still to be opened.

The Local MeT office had issued an orange warning of thunderstorms accompanied with lightning, hail, heavy rains and gusty winds (40-50kmph) at isolated places in seven out of 12 districts in the state on Saturday. *—PTI*

A Himachal Roadways Transport Corporation (HRTC) bus turned turtle near Maling in the Kinnaur district *PHOTO: PTI*

Ex-IAS, 2 others named in Gurdwara murder FIR

DEHRADUN, 30 MARCH

Days after Kar Seva Pramukh Baba Tarsem Singh was shot dead by two bike-borne assailants, an FIR has been lodged in Nanakmatta Police Station against former IAS officer Harbansh Singh Chugh and two others, Pritam Singh and Baba Anoop Singh for the alleged murder.

A sevadar of the Kar Seva, Jasbir Singh, alleged that Harbansh Singh Chugh and two others had conspired to kill the Kar Seva Pramukh. He also stated that, apart from these three, other people are also involved in the murder conspiracy.

According to Jasbir Singh, former IAS officer Harbansh Singh Chugh, Pritam Singh, and Baba Anoop Singh conspired to murder Baba Tarsem Singh, to prevent them from misappropriating the property of Gurudwara Nanakmatta Sahib.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami visited the Nanakmatta Gurdwara camp on Thursday and paid tribute to Baba Tarsem Singh. Along with the Chief Minister, Lok Sabha candidate Ajay Bhatt was also present. Police officials have also contacted central agencies to share useful input, and a massive search operation is underway to nab the culprits. The state police are confident of solving the murder.

- Additional police forces have also been deployed in the Nanakmatta area of Udham Singh Nagar district to maintain peace and police have appealed to the Sikh community to maintain peace

Additional police forces have also been deployed in the Nanakmatta area of Udham Singh Nagar district to maintain peace and police have appealed to the Sikh community to maintain peace.

Meanwhile, SDM Khatima Ravindra Singh Bisht said that the law and order situation is normal in the area. *—ANI*

Ch'garh cops reject Maoist claims on encounter

BIJAPUR, 30 MARCH

- The incident in question also involved a photograph circulating on social media showing a man with his handsbound, surrounded bysecurity personnel in a forest in Bijapur

The Chhattisgarh Police on Friday refuted Maoist allegations of staging a recent encounter in which six Naxals were killed, saying it was a tactic to undermine the credibility of security forces and a diversionary method to hide their own violent acts.

Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P emphasised that Maoists often resort to such claims to divert attention from their own violent acts, highlighting the extremists' responsibility for numerous civilian deaths.

He was reacting to a statement of banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) who claimed that the encounter in the state's Bijapur district on Wednesday was staged and the six persons were killed by police after they were caught.

The incident in question also involved a photograph circulating on social media showing a man with his hands bound, surrounded by security personnel in a forest in Bijapur. Subsequently, police shared images of the bodies of six Naxalites.

The resemblance between the man in the photograph and one of the slain Naxalites raised questions, prompting IG Sundarraj to assure that an investigation would be carried out and the authenticity of the photograph will be checked with relevant units.

A purported statement attributed to Ganga, the secretary of the South Bastar Division Committee of Maoists, alleged that two of their cadres and four villagers were detained, interrogated, and later killed by the police during the encounter, which they claimed was staged.

The Maoists denied the presence of armed cadres or any exchange of fire during the incident. *—PTI*

'DETERIORATING ENVIRONMENT'

Global talk not backed by local walk: Cong

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Former Union environment minister Jairam Ramesh alleged that the last 10 years of the Modi government have been a disaster *PHOTO: PTI*

The Congress on Saturday listed the Narendra Modi government's "failures" on environmental issues, claiming that its "global talk is not backed by local walk" and when the INDIA bloc "takes over in June", the regressive steps of the current regime will be rolled back.

The party's general secretary and former Union environment minister Jairam Ramesh alleged that the last 10 years of the Modi government have been a disaster, not just for India's people and democracy, but also for the environment and those who depend on it.

"The Prime Minister, who famously said that the 'climate is not changing, we are changing', has systematically destroyed protections for the environment in India," he alleged.

Ramesh claimed that the key patterns are to strip local communities of any power over their forests and make it easier to hand forest land over to the Modi government's "crony corporate friends".He listed 10 "failures" of the Modi government on environmental issues.

These are, "the disastrous Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, anti-Adivasi Forest Conservation Rules, dilution of the Biological Diversity (Amendment), secretive amendments to the Environment Protection Act, legalisation of projects after violation of forest clearance, weakening Environmental Impact Assessment norms, destruction of independent environmental institutions, rising air pollution, Wildlife Protection Act weakened, and coal mines were given on corporate lobbying," he said.

Ramesh said the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 is a critical law to protect forests from encroachment and deforestation.

However, a 2023 amendment by the Modi government has hollowed it from within, he alleged. "The amendment removes protections for 25 per cent of India's forest cover, or almost two lakh square km of forest, in violation of the 1996 TN Godavarman Supreme Court order.

The intention is to hand over access to our forests to the prime minister's corporate friends," Ramesh alleged.

He also claimed that in addition to the attack via the Forest Conservation Amendment Act, the Modi government has attacked the traditional forest rights of Adivasis and forest-dwelling communities with the 2022 Forest Conservation Rules. *—PTI*

CROPS DESTROYED

A farmer inspects his damaged wheat crop following strong winds and rains, at a village, in Jalandhar, on Saturday. ***PHOTO: PTI***

India experiences heatwaves beyond human survival

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) declared 2024's first heatwave conditions for isolated pockets of west Rajasthan on 27 March, 2024. But there are many more places that likely suffered from humid heatwaves and will continue to do so in the next few days. These are not being accounted for in IMD's heatwave data.

The basic criteria for IMD to declare a heatwave is when the temperature of a place crosses 40 degrees Celsius (°C) in the plains, 37°C in the coastal areas and 30°C in the hills. These temperature values are the thresholds set by IMD for the declaration of heatwaves in India.

Apart from this, the temperature of a particular day has to be above normal by at least 4.5°C for two consecutive days for a heatwave to be declared.

When the temperature crosses 45°C, the weather agency immediately declares a heatwave without considering the deviation from normal temperature for that particular place.

But this criteria does not take into account relative humidity, which is increasingly becoming a cause of humid heatwaves.

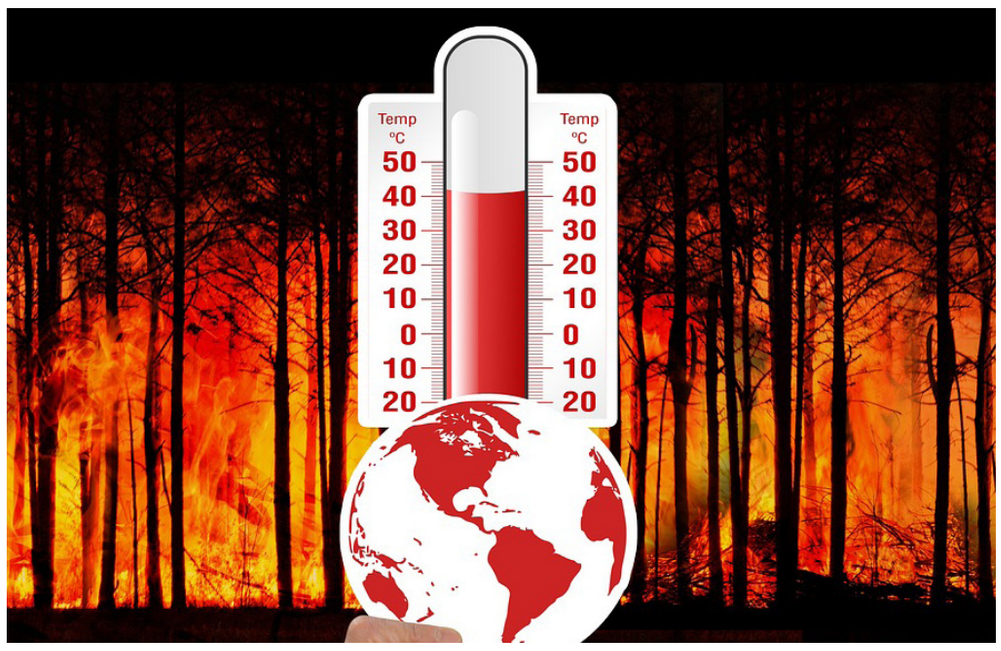
During a humid heatwave, the temperature felt by the human body or by other animals and plants is much higher. This happens even when the observed temperatures are lower than the thresholds because of relative humidity, which is a measure of the moisture levels in the atmosphere.

The combined impact of temperature and relative humidity can be captured by calculating the wet bulb temperature or heat index of a place.

This takes into account both the variables and gives the actual felt temperature.

Wet bulb temperature is the lowest temperature to which air can be cooled by the evaporation of water into the air at constant pressure.

And this evaporation is constantly happening from the skin through sweating, which helps humans cool down when there is excessive heat.



There may be heatwaves close to human survivability threshold of heat stress in India ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

But if there is higher moisture in the atmosphere, this cooling down takes place at a much slower pace or stops completely. At such a point, the temperature of the human body starts increasing, leading to heat stroke and death.

Internationally, the agreed upon safe limit of wet bulb temperature is below 30°C and highest limit is 35°C, above which the possibility of human death becomes almost certain.

Between 30°C and 35°C, the human body undergoes hyperthermia, in which the body temperature increases leading to discomfort and multiple impacts on various organs including the brain and the heart.

Around mid-day on 28 March, Sholapur in Maharashtra recorded a maximum temperature of 40°C and relative humidity of 53 per cent. This translates to a wet bulb temperature of 31.54°C.

Similarly, Jalgaon recorded a maximum temperature of 46.8°C and relative humidity of 29 per cent, which translates to a wet bulb temperature of 30.72°C.

Currently, this is not captured in the IMD definition of a heatwave as the weather agency does not calculate wet bulb temperature of a place, though there would be declaration of heatwave conditions for the Jalgaon region which falls under Madhya Maharashtra subdivision as its temperature exceeded 45°C.

The IMD has come up with two new terminologies for heat stress experienced by the place — 'warm night conditions' and 'hot humid weather'.

IMD has also predicted hot and humid weather for the Saurashtra and Kutch regions of Gujarat on 28 March and 29 March and for Rayalaseema, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Kerala and Mahe between 28 March and 1 April. But what is meant by 'hot and humid weather' is not clearly defined by IMD.

Even the thresholds of 30°C and 35°C are not exactly accurate. There have to be separate thresholds for tropical countries and these need to be continuously monitored and humid heat alerts generated for the impacted population.

In a research paper published in the Journal of Applied Physiology of the American Physiological Society in December 2021, scientists had found that the wet bulb temperature threshold of 35°C cannot be applied to human adaptability across all climatic conditions. In high humidity conditions, that threshold could be well below 35°C.

This was the first study with empirical evidence that evaluated the impact of wet bulb temperature on human health.

This means that there may be humid heatwaves close to the human survivability threshold of heat stress already occurring in India and they are not being monitored. More importantly, the people being impacted are not being informed about the occurrence of such conditions.

—Downtoearth

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR ساڈا

Employment scenario in India grim: ILO report

For the decade 2012 to 2022, the "real" earning of a regular salaried and self-employed person in India has been declining, according to a recent report released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Institute for Human Development (IHD), the Delhi-based non-profit set up by the Indian Society of Labour Economics.

The report India Employment Report 2024 says that the average monthly real earnings of regular salaried and self-employed people "have either declined or remained stable". "Real" earning is an inflation-adjusted figure. The report has used data from Government of India sources.

"The average monthly real earnings for regular salaried workers declined annually by 1.2 per cent, from 12,100 rupees in 2012 to Rs 11,155 in 2019, and by 0.7 per cent as of 2022, to Rs 10,925," estimates the report.

The same trend is visible for self-employed Indians, who constitute a significant percentage of employed people. "The average real earnings of self-employed individuals declined annually by 0.8 per cent, from Rs 7,017 in 2019 to Rs 6,843 in 2022," the report says.

However, the real monthly earnings of casual workers have increased in the past decade. "The average real monthly earnings of casual workers increased by 2.4 per cent annually, from Rs 3,701 in 2012 to Rs 4,364 in 2019, and by 2.6 per cent annually, to Rs 4,712 in 2022," the report says.

Average earnings declined annually by 1.2 per cent ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

- Among the workers engaged in the construction sector, 39.3 per cent of regular workers and 69.5 per cent of casual workers did not receive the average daily minimum wage

"The declining real earnings of regular salaried workers and the self-employed, along with only a small increase in real wages for casual workers in India, indicates that the quality of employment generation was poor between 2000 and 2022," attributes the ILO-IHD report to this trend.

The report analysed whether employed persons are getting the basic minimum wage as prescribed by the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment for various scheduled jobs based on skill-levels. "At the all-India level, 40.8 per cent of regular workers and 51.9 per cent of casual workers did not receive the average daily minimum wage prescribed for unskilled workers in the agriculture sector," says the report based on data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey for 2022.

"Among the workers engaged in the construction sector, 39.3 per cent of regular workers and 69.5 per cent of casual workers did not receive the average daily minimum wage prescribed for unskilled workers in the sector," the report says. *—Downtoearth*

40.8 per cent of regular workers and 51.9 per cent casual workers did not receive wages ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Being in nature changes our perception of time

Meta's Do you ever get that feeling that there aren't enough hours in the day? That time is somehow racing away from you, and it is impossible to fit everything in. But then, you step outside into the countryside and suddenly everything seems slower, more relaxed, like time has somehow changed.

It's not just you - recent research showed nature can regulate our sense of time.

For many of us, the combined demands of work, home and family mean that we are always feeling like we don't have enough time. Time poverty has also been exacerbated by digital technologies. Permanent connectivity extends working hours and can make it difficult to switch off from the demands of friends and family.

Recent research suggests that the antidote to our lack of time may lie in the natural world. Psychologist Richardo Correia, at the University of Turku in Finland, found that being in nature may change how we experience time and, perhaps, even give us the sense of time abundance.

Correia examined research which compared people's experiences of time when they performed different types of tasks in urban and natural environments. These studies consistently showed that people report a sense of expanded time when they were in nature compared to when they were in an urban environment.

For example, people are more likely to perceive a walk in the countryside as longer than a walk of the same length in the city. Similarly, people report perceiving time as passing more slowly while performing tasks in natural green environments than in urban environments. Nature seems to slow and expand our sense of time.

It's not just our sense of time in the moment which appears to be altered by the natural world, it's also our sense of the past and future.

Previous research shows that spending time in nature helps to shift our focus from the immediate moment towards our future needs. So rather than focusing on the stress of the demands on our time, nature helps us to see the bigger picture.

This can help us to prioritise our actions so that we meet our long-term goals rather than living in a perpetual state of "just about keeping our head above water".

This is in part because spending time in nature appears to make us less impulsive, enabling us to delay instant gratification in favour of long-term rewards.

Study suggests that antidote to our lack of time may lie in the natural world. ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Why does nature affect our sense of time?

Spending time in nature is known to have many benefits for health and wellbeing. Having access to natural spaces such as beaches, parks and woodlands is associated with reduced anxiety and depression, improved sleep, reduced levels of obesity and cardiovascular disease, and improved wellbeing.

Some of these benefits may explain why being in nature alters our experience of time.

The way we experience time is shaped by our internal biological state and the events going on in the world around us. As a result, emotions such as stress, anxiety and fear can distort our sense of the passage of time.

- Spending time in nature is known to have many benefits for health and wellbeing. Having access to natural spaces such as beaches, parks and woodlands is associated with reduced anxiety and depression

The relaxing effect of natural environments may counter stress and anxiety, resulting in a more stable experience of time. Indeed, the absence of access to nature during COVID-19 may help to explain why people's sense of time became so distorted during the pandemic lockdowns.

In the short term, being away from the demands of modern day life may provide the respite needed to re-prioritise life, and reduce time pressure by focusing on what actually needs to be done. In the longer term, time in nature may help to enhance our memory and attention capacity, making us better able to deal with the demands on our time.

Accessing nature

Getting out into nature may sound like a simple fix, but for many people, particularly those living in urban areas, nature can be hard to access. Green infrastructure such as trees, woodlands, parks and allotments in and around towns and cities are essential to making sure the benefits of time in nature are accessible to everyone.

If spending time in nature isn't possible for you, there are other ways that you can regain control of your time. Start by closely examining how you use time throughout your week. Auditing your time can help you see where time is being wasted and to identify action to help you to free up more time in your life.

Alternatively, try to set yourself some boundaries in how you use time. This could be limiting when you access emails and social media, or it could be booking in time in your calendar to take a break. Taking control of your time and how you use it can help to you overcome the sense that time is running away from you.

—The Conversation

8 migrants die in boat accident off Mexico coast

MEXICO CITY, 30 MARCH

The bodies of eight migrants, apparently from Asia, were found after a boat accident off Mexico's southern Pacific coast, authorities said Friday. Prosecutors in the southern state of Oaxaca said one survivor, an Asian man, was located. Based on preliminary investigations, the dead appeared to have been from Asia. The bodies were found near a beach in the town of Playa Vicente, which is about 400 km east of Mexico's border with Guatemala. The causes of the boat accident were under investigation. The area is a key route for migrants seeking to cross Mexico to reach the U.S. border. Most migrants travel by land, but some pay to make the journey by sea seeking to avoid immigration checkpoints inside Mexico. *—AP*

5 Pak miners killed after roof collapses due to heavy rain

KARACHI, 30 MARCH

At least five mine workers were killed when the roof of a house collapsed due to heavy rainfall in Pakistan's Balochistan province. According to the police officials, the house was built for the accommodation of the workers outside the local coal mine. The coal mine collapsed due to the torrential rain and five workers were buried under the debris and died, they said. According to the police authorities, the bodies of the deceased were shifted to the hospital, from where they were sent to their native areas after necessary action. The heavy rains have also killed some seven people from a house collapse in the same area, police said. The incident comes just days after 12 coal miners were killed in a methane gas explosion inside a mine in Harnai. *—PTI*

UK: Indian teen 1st to get life-changing cancer treatment

LONDON, 30 MARCH

Yuvan Thakkar, an Indian-origin teenager diagnosed with cancer, says he is now able to enjoy the things he loves after life-changing treatment thanks to a fund set up by the UK's state-funded National Health Service to make innovative therapies accessible to thousands of patients. According to NHS England, 16-year-old Thakkar from Watford near London was the first child in the UK to benefit from a pioneering CAR T therapy called tisagenlecleucel (Kymriah) thanks to its Cancer Drugs Fund (CDF). It comes as the National Health Service (NHS) marks a milestone this weekend of 100,000 patients benefitting from early access to the latest and most innovative treatments with the help of CDF. *—PTI*

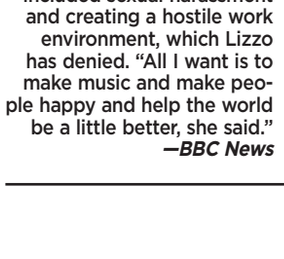


PHOTO: X/ @LIZZO

Lizzo says she 'quits' after 'lies' against her

WASHINGTON, 30 MARCH

Lizzo has said she is "quitting" because she is fed up of being targeted for her looks and character online. In a post on Instagram, the US pop star wrote: "I'm starting to feel like the world doesn't want me in it." She did not clarify if this meant she was leaving the music industry or social media. "I'm getting tired of putting up with being dragged by everyone in my life and on the internet," Lizzo wrote. Her post comes a day after a lawyer representing her former dancers criticised the decision to choose the pop star to headline a fundraising event amid accusations made against her last year. The dancers' allegations included sexual harassment and creating a hostile work environment, which Lizzo has denied. "All I want is to make music and make people happy and help the world be a little better, she said." *—BBC News*

US approves 2K bombs, jets worth $2.5 B for Israel

This was amid US publicly criticising Israeli invasion of Rafah

WASHINGTON, 30 MARCH

United States has greenlighted the transfer of billions of dollars worth of bombs and fighter jets to Israel, The Washington Post reported. This was amid it publicly expressing concerns about the long-threatened Israeli invasion of Gaza's Rafah and the rising civilian casualties in the enclave.

The new arms package includes more than 1,800 MK84 2,000-pound bombs and 500 MK82 500-pound bombs, according to Pentagon and Department of State officials, the Washington Post reported on Friday.

The 2,000-pound bombs, which can inflict damage to people up to 1,000 feet away, have been "linked to previous mass-casualty events throughout Israel's military campaign in Gaza", the report said. The US gives $3.8bn in annual military assistance to its longtime ally.

Reporting from Washington, DC, Al Jazeera's Kimberly Halkett said the transfer "amounts to about $2.5 billion", adding that "this is taking place despite a growing rift between both the Israeli and US governments".

The US continues to provide weapons packages to Israel while pushing for an end to hostilities in the five-month war and on Monday did not veto a United Nations Security Council resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the release of captives.

Smoke rises following an explosion in the Gaza Strip as seen from southern Israel *PHOTO: PTI*

While Washington is publicly pressuring Israel to "dial back" its war in Gaza, its policy moves are sending an entirely different signal, Marc Owen Jones, associate professor of Middle East studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, told Al Jazeera.

In the face of widespread international condemnation, including from Washington, Israel has said it will soon launch a ground invasion of Rafah, the southernmost city in the Gaza Strip that borders Egypt and where about 1.5 million forcibly displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

US senators have urged President Joe Biden to cut military aid to Israel until it ensures access to humanitarian aid for Gaza. Many countries and rights groups have called for Israel to obey an International Court of Justice order to allow the unimpeded delivery of aid into Gaza, where famine has set in.

US Senator Bernie Sanders slammed the move as "obscene".

"The US cannot beg Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to stop bombing civilians one day and the next send him thousands more 2,000-pound bombs that can level entire city blocks," he said in a post on X. Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi called on the international community to stop supplying Israel with weapons. *—Al Jazeera*

US welcomes new Palestinian govt

JERUSALEM, 30 MARCH

United States has welcomed the formation of a new Palestinian autonomy government, signalling it is accepting the revised Cabinet lineup as a step toward Palestinian political reform. The Biden administration has called for "revitalising" the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority in hopes that it can also administer the Gaza Strip once the Israel-Hamas war ends.

US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said the United States looks forward to working with the new group of ministers "to deliver on credible reforms."

The Palestinian Authority administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. It is headed by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who has not faced an election in almost two decades.

The United States sees the Palestinian Authority as a key part of its preferred plans for post-war Gaza. But the authority has little popular support or legitimacy among Palestinians, with many viewing it as a subcontractor of the occupation because of its security cooperation with Israel in the West Bank. *—AP*

Most Jewish men are required to serve nearly three years in the military, followed by years of reserve duty *X/@THEHILL*

SC ruling on ultra-Orthodox funding rattles Bibi

JERUSALEM, 30 MARCH

Israel's Supreme Court ruling curtailing subsidies for ultra-Orthodox men has rattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition and raised questions about its viability as the country presses on with the war in Gaza.

Netanyahu has until Monday to present the court with a plan to dismantle what the justices called a system that privileges the ultra-Orthodox at the expense of the secular Jewish public.

If that plan alienates the ultra-Orthodox lawmakers on whose support he depends, his coalition could disintegrate and the country could be forced to hold new elections.

Most Jewish men are required to serve nearly three years in the military, followed by years of reserve duty. Jewish women serve two mandatory years.

But the politically powerful ultra-Orthodox, who make up roughly 13 per cent of Israeli society, have traditionally received exemptions while studying full time in religious seminaries, or yeshivas.

This years-old system has bred widespread resentment among the broader public a feeling that has deepened during nearly six months of war. More than 500 soldiers have been killed in fighting, and tens of thousands of Israelis have had their careers, studies and family lives disrupted because of reserve duty.

Supreme Court ruled that the current system is discriminatory and gave the government until Monday to present a new plan, and until 30 June to pass one. Many Israelis are celebrating the court's decision, believing it spells an end to a system that takes for granted their military service and economic contributions while advantaging the ultra-Orthodox, or "Haredim" as they are called in Israel. Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister, is known as a master political survivor. But his room for manoeuvre is limited. Vowing to press forward with a war that has harmed the Israeli economy and asked much of its soldiers and reservists, Netanyahu could lose the support of the more centrist elements of his fragile national unity government if he tries to preserve the exemptions for the ultra-Orthodox. *—AP*

'Predecessor operated on orders of foreigners'

MALE, 30 MARCH

Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu has alleged his predecessor and the Opposition leader, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, of operating on orders from the foreign ambassador, Maldives-based Maldives News Network reported.

Maldives News Network (MNN) is a registered news network operated by Maldives News Network PVT LTD in the Maldives.

In an interview with Public Service Media (PSM), Muizzu responded to criticism regarding the recent procurement of military drones.

He noted that the main opposition, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), when it held office from 2018-2023 failed to protect the Maldives independence, leaving it in hands of foreign country despite having supermajority in the Parliament

He said that President Solih had operated on orders from a foreign ambassador, which

Mohamed Muizzu *PHOTO: X/ @RAEES_MUIZZU*

resulted in extensive damage, reported MNN.

However, he did not specify which foreign country he was referring to. "We had lost independence in all sense of the word, including economically. After having done all this, they would naturally not accept our efforts to remedy all this and put the country on a track that the Maldivian people want, towards a 'Dhiveheenge Raajje'," he said. Regarding the cost of the drones, President Muizzu said that, while he believes in transparency, such military secrets aren't disclosed by any country, Maldives News Network reported. *—ANI*

'US, PAK TIES IMPORTANT'

US President assures Pak PM of continuous support

WASHINGTON, 30 MARCH

Marking the first official communication with a Pakistani Premier during his tenure, US President Joe Biden has dashed off a letter to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressing continuous support and highlighted that the ties between the two nations are critical for bilateral and regional peace and security.

After assuming office in January 2021, Biden neither telephoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan after his election victory nor spoke to Sharif when he succeeded Khan in April 2022, The Express Tribune said on Friday.

Sharif took oath as the country's Prime Minister for a second time earlier this month after a controversial election that his rival and former Prime

Joe Biden *PHOTO: PTI*

Shehbaz Sharif *PHOTO: X/@CMSHEHBAZ*

Minister Imran Khan dubbed as "rigged." Khan, who is the founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, had also openly accused the US of orchestrating his downfall after he was removed through a vote of no-confidence in April 2022.

According to the contents of Mr Biden's letter, shared by US Embassy here, "The enduring partnership between our nations remains critical to ensuring the security of our people and the United States will continue to stand with Pakistan to tackle the most pressing global and regional challenges of our time."

Biden added that through the US-Pakistan Green Alliance framework, the two nations would continue strengthening their climate resilience, supporting sustainable agriculture and water management and advancing Pakistan's recovery from the devastating floods of 2022. *—PTI*

Donald Trump posted a video of a hog-tied President Joe Biden painted on the tailgate of a passing truck *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

I don't sit by the door: Biden's joke on Boeing mishaps

NEW YORK, 30 MARCH

President Joe Biden joked about being away from the plane doors manufactured by Boeing, a company recently plagued by mid-flight mishaps, the New York Post reported.

"I don't sit by the door," quipped the 81-year-old president, followed by a quick disclaimer, "I'm only kidding. I shouldn't joke about that." His remarks came during a high-dollar campaign fundraiser at Radio City Music Hall. The quip came in response to a question from CBS "Late Show" host Steven Colbert about whether Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg had tightened the bolts on the presidential plane before Biden's trip to New York City.

Boeing is one of two highly customised Boeing 747-200Bs. However, Boeing has faced scrutiny following a series of mid-flight incidents. The troubles began with a door blowout on a Boeing 737 Max 9 operated by Alaska Airlines on January 5th, leading to the grounding of all 737 Max 9s by the Federal Aviation Administration. Investi gations revealed missing bolts from the rear door of the Alaska Airlines jet, adding to concerns about Boeing's safety protocols. *—ANI*

Govt agents raid Peruvian Prez's home

LIMA, 30 MARCH

Televised images swept Peru late on Friday of government agents from an investigative team breaking into the president's residence with a sledgehammer in a raid authorized by the judiciary at the request of the attorney general's office.

Dina Boluarte is being preliminarily investigated for possessing an undisclosed collection of luxury watches since she came to power in July 2021 as vice president and Social Inclusion minister, and then as president in December 2022. Initially, she claimed ownership of at least one Rolex as a long-held possession acquired through "personal gains" since the age of 18, urging the media not to delve into personal matters.

Earlier in the week, Attorney General Juan Villena criticized Boluarte's request to delay her appearance before the court for two weeks, emphasizing her obligation to cooperate with the investigation.

Political turmoil is nothing new in Peru, which has seen six presidents in the last five years. But many see Boluarte's recent statements as contradicting her earlier pledge to speak truthfully to prosecutors, exacerbating a political crisis stemming from her unexplained ownership of Rolex watches.

The Attorney General emphasised Boluarte's obligation to promptly produce the three Rolex watches for investigation, cautioning against their disposal or destruction.

Boluarte, a 61-year-old lawyer, ascended from a modest district official to vice president under President Pedro Castillo in July 2021, subsequently assuming the presidency in December 2022 following Castillo's impeachment after he attempted to dissolve congress and rule by decree. *—AP*

POPE SKIPS GOOD FRIDAY EVENT TO PRESERVE HEALTH AHEAD OF EASTER

ROME, 30 MARCH

Pope Francis skipped the traditional Good Friday procession at Rome's Colosseum to protect his health, the Vatican said, making a last-minute decision that added to concerns about his frail condition during a particularly busy period.

Francis had been expected to preside over the Way of the Cross procession, which re-enacts Christ's Passion and crucifixion, and composed the meditations that are read aloud at each station. But just as the event was about to begin, the Vatican announced that Francis was following the event from his home at the Vatican. While Francis had also skipped the event in 2023 because he was recovering from bronchitis and it was a particularly cold night, his decision to stay home this year suggested his plans had changed suddenly. The 87-year-old Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, has been battling with flu, bronchitis or a cold all winter long. *—AP*

THIS YEAR

'3M Afghan kids will suffer malnutrition'

KABUL, 30 MARCH

The World Food Programme (WFP) in Afghanistan has warned that this year, up to three million children could suffer from malnutrition under the Taliban regime, Khaama Press news agency reported.

The organisation stated that since last year, due to a reduction in foreign aid, the number of malnourished children seeking treatment has increased.

Khaama Press reported, citing Mona Sheikh, Head of Nutrition at the World Food Programme in Afghanistan who said in a video posted on the organisation's account on its social media platform X, "We will be able to assist about 1.6 million malnourished children."

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) previously announced that in 2023, it assisted 715,000 malnourished children in Afghanistan.

Many families in Afghanistan under Taliban control are unable to provide food for their children *PHOTO: ANI*

According to international organisations, many families in Afghanistan under Taliban control are unable to provide food for their children.

Additionally, reports indicate that since the Taliban took power, Afghanistan has been facing a dire humanitarian crisis, exacerbating the already precarious situation.

The lack of stability and access to basic necessities has led to widespread suffering, particularly among vulnerable groups like women and children.

Moreover, the shortfall of funds from international organizations has significantly hindered relief efforts in Afghanistan.

This has left millions of people at risk of famine and deprived them of essential humanitarian aid, further worsening the humanitarian situation in the country. Despite over 450 days passing, universities in Afghanistan remain closed to girls, with no signs of reopening on the horizon, TOLO News reported.

Expressing their frustration, female students highlight the significant delay in their academic progress, urging the Talibani caretaker government to prioritise the reopening of universities this year. *—ANI*

Senegal's top court says Faye wins presidential polls

DAKAR, 30 MARCH

Senegal's highest judicial authority, the Constitutional Council, has officially affirmed the triumph of opposition leader Bassirou Diomaye Faye in the presidential election, solidifying his path to becoming the nation's fifth president, Al Jazeera reported.

The announcement, made on Friday, sets the stage for Faye's inauguration, slated for April 2nd.

This confirmation follows the validation of provisional results announced earlier in the week, derived from complete vote counts across all polling stations. Faye, known for his anti-establishment stance and affiliation with prominent opposition figure Ousmane Sonko, secured over 54 per cent of the ballots in the delayed presidential election held the previous Sunday.

His primary contender, Amadou Ba, representing the ruling coalition and personally selected by outgoing President Macky Sall, garnered approximately 35 per cent of the vote, according to the Council's findings. Notably, no objections were raised by other candidates in response to the results, as reported by Al Jazeera.

At just 44 years old, Faye's ascent to the presidency makes him the youngest head of state in Africa, marking a significant moment in Senegal's political landscape. The African Union lauded the widespread acceptance of the election outcome, with Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat extending warm congratulations to Faye and expressing optimism for his tenure. French President Emmanuel Macron echoed these sentiments, extending felicitations to Faye and affirming France's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations with Senegal. *—AP*

'UPI has transformed India's economy'

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has emerged as a transformative force in India's digital landscape, revolutionising the way financial transactions are conducted. Now, its influence extends far beyond the nation's borders, shaping global conversations around economic growth, entrepreneurship, and job creation. "Indeed, UPI has been a game-changer, offering a level playing field for digital transactions. The government-backed digital infrastructure has instilled trust from day one, fostering rapid adoption and innovation. The simplicity of UPI empowers users to conduct transactions seamlessly across various platforms, promoting financial inclusion and efficiency." said Girish Krishnan.

"UPI's convenience and digital empowerment are reshaping payment ecosystems, leading to a harmonious coexistence of traditional and digital methods. As we navigate this transformative landscape, the future holds promise for seamless transactions and enhanced financial empowerment." Zubair Ulla Zubair highlights a decline in debit card usage, especially in e-commerce, favoring UPI instead. While credit cards offer extended credit periods, UPI's integration with credit cards sparks consumer interest. He envisions a coexistence of payment methods, with UPI driving transformative changes in the payment landscape towards convenience and financial empowerment.

—PTI

No hurry to cut interest rates, US Fed Chair indicates

NEW YORK, 30 MARCH

US Federal Reserve on Friday indicated that it was not in any hurry to cut interest rates.

In his address at an event hosted by the San Francisco Fed on Friday, US Fed Chair Jerome Powell said "We don't need to be in a hurry to cut."

Powell further added that strong employment data is buying the central bank more time to wait until inflation gets closer to 2 per cent, reported CNN.

The US Fed chair also raised concerns on cutting rates too early. "If we reduce rates too soon, there's a chance that inflation would pop back and we'd have to come back in and that would be very disruptive (to the economy)," he said.

On Friday CNN had reported that the Federal Reserve's preferred inflation gauge, the Personal Consumption Expenditures price index, was up 2.5 per cent for the 12 months that ended in February, a faster pace than January's 2.4 per cent rise in prices.

In his address, Powell recognised the risks of leaving rates at their current levels. "This is an economy that doesn't feel like it's suffering from the current level of rates," Powell said. The US Fed is trying to balance two risks: On one hand, officials do not want to keep interest rates too high for too long, risking an unnecessary recession. On the other, they do not want to cut interest rates too early, before inflation is fully under control, reported the New York Times. *—ANI*

India's forex reserves rise by $140M to hit fresh peak

This is 5th consecutive week of a jump in the overall reserves

The previous peak level was recorded in September 2021 when the country's foreign exchange reserves reached USD 642.453 billion **PHOTO: PIXBAY**

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

India's forex reserves increased by USD 140 million to touch its all-time high of USD 642.631 billion during the week ended 22 March, the Reserve Bank said.

This is the fifth consecutive week of a jump in the overall reserves.

The kitty had increased by USD 6.396 billion to USD 642.492 billion in the previous reporting week.

The previous peak level was recorded in September 2021 when the country's foreign exchange reserves reached USD 642.453 billion.

The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year.

For the week ended 22 March, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 123 million to USD 568.264 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased by USD 347 million to USD 51.487 billion during the week, the RBI said.

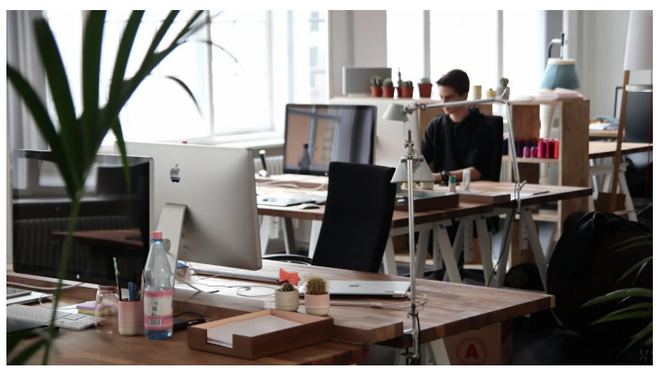
The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 57 million to USD 18.219 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was also down by USD 27 million to USD 4.662 billion in the reporting week, the RBI data showed.

—PTI

Net leasing of office space up 44 % at 115 lakh sq ft in 8 cities

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH



Net absorption or leasing rose in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi-NCR and Chennai but fell in Pune, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad **PHOTO: PIXBAY**

Net leasing of office space rose 44 per cent annually in this quarter across eight major cities on higher demand from corporates for expansion of their businesses, according to Cushman & Wakefield.

According to data released on Saturday by real estate consultant Cushman & Wakefield (C&W) India, the net leasing of office space stood at 115.14 lakh (11.5 million) square feet (sq ft) during January-March as against 80.09 lakh (8 million) sq ft in the year-ago period.

"This is the third-highest level recorded in the last five years, demonstrating a robust appetite for office space among businesses," the consultant highlighted.

Net absorption or leasing rose in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi-NCR and Chennai but fell in Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Ahmedabad.

"The Indian office market is experiencing a robust momentum. We haven't witnessed 20 million square feet of gross leasing being recorded for two consecutive quarters in recent history.

"This strong performance may signal a shift and has the potential to become the new standard for the Indian market," Anshul Jain, Chief Executive, India & Southeast Asia and Head of Asia Pacific Tenant Representation at C&W, said.

Gross leasing of office space across eight cities rose 33 per cent to 201.31 lakh (20.13 million) sq ft in January-March from 151.57 lakh sq ft in the corresponding period of the previous year.

The strong leasing signifies a surge in tenant interest in office space, he added.

"As witnessed in the previous quarters, the impressive surge in office demand is primarily driven by fresh leasing. We are confident that a balanced supply pipeline and continued tenant demand will propel further growth in the Indian office market," Jain said.

Among cities, Mumbai witnessed a more than three-fold jump in net office leasing to 24,69,912 sq ft from 7,23,735 sq ft.

In Bengaluru, the net absorption of office space jumped more than two times to 35,98,732 sq ft from 15,65,599 sq ft.

Net office space leasing in Chennai surged 77 per cent to 8,75,783 sq ft from 4,95,886 sq ft.

Delhi-NCR saw a modest growth of 18 per cent in net leasing to 14,51,214 sq ft from 12,34,254 sq ft. *—PTI*

UNSOLD HOMES IN 9 CITIES DOWN 7% IN LAST 3 MONTHS

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Unsold housing inventories fell 7 per cent in the last three months across 9 major cities to around 4.81 lakh units on higher sales than new supply, according to PropEquity.

Real estate data analytic firm PropEquity data showed that unsold housing stock has come down to 4,81,566 units at the end of March this year from 5,18,868 units at the end of December 2023 across 9 major cities.

These cities are Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Thane, Delhi-NCR (Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad and Faridabad), Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai and Kolkata.

PropEquity founder and Managing Director (MD) Samir Jasuja said the unsold housing stocks have declined as "sales are surpassing the new launches which is a positive indicator for the market".

During January-March period of 2024, housing sales across 9 major cities stood at 1,44,656 units while the new launches were 1,05,134 units. This led to a reduction in the unsold stocks.

As per the data, Pune saw the maximum 13 per cent fall in the unsold housing stocks to 65,788 units at the end of this month from 75,521 units. *—PTI*

US PROBES PLAINTS OF FORD PICKUPS DOWNSHIFTING WITHOUT WARNING

WASHINGTON, 30 MARCH

US auto safety regulators are investigating complaints that more than 540,000 Ford pickup trucks can abruptly downshift to a lower gear and increase the risk of a crash.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says in documents posted on its website Friday that it opened the investigation this week after receiving 86 consumer complaints about the problem with the trucks' automatic transmissions. Investigation documents say the probe covers F-150s from the 2014 model year. The agency is looking into whether those trucks should have been included in previous recalls for the problem. The complaints allege that the trucks can suddenly shift to a lower gear without warning. *—PTI*

VOICE ENGINE

OpenAI says it plans to preview it with early testers "but not widely release this technology **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

OpenAI unveils AI that can clone voices in 15 seconds

SAN FRANCISCO, 30 MARCH

ChatGPT-maker OpenAI is getting into the voice assistant business and showing off new technology that can clone a person's voice, but says it won't yet release it publicly due to safety concerns.

The artificial intelligence company unveiled its new Voice Engine technology Friday, just over a week after filing a trademark application for the name. The company claims that it can recreate a person's voice with just 15 seconds of recording of that person talking.

OpenAI says it plans to preview it with early testers "but not widely release this technology at this time" because of the dangers of misuse.

"We recognise that generating speech that resembles people's voices has serious risks, which are especially top of mind in an election year," the San Francisco company said in a statement.

In New Hampshire, authorities are investigating robocalls sent to thousands of voters just before the presidential primary that featured an AI-generated voice mimicking President Joe Biden. A number of startup companies already sell voice-cloning technology, some of which is accessible to the public or for select business customers such as entertainment studios. OpenAI says early Voice Engine testers have agreed to not impersonate a person without their consent and to disclose that the voices are AI-generated. The company, best known for its chatbot and the image-generator DALL-E, took a similar approach in announcing but not widely releasing its video-generator Sora. *—PTI*

India's imports from Nordic-Baltic amounted to $5.44B in 2023: CII

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) highlighted the burgeoning trade ties between India and the Nordic-Baltic countries, emphasising the vast potential for collaboration and mutual growth.

CII posted on X, "While trade between India and Nordic-Baltic countries is on the rise, it also offers a vast opportunity to both the sides to form partnerships and create opportunities for collaborative growth. #DYK India's imports from the Nordic-Baltic region amounted to USD 5.44 Bn in 2022-23."

Sweden emerged as India's top trade partner in the Nordic-Baltic region during the fiscal year 2022-23, with a total trade volume of USD 2,692 million.

India's exports to Sweden reached USD 961.63 million, while imports from the region stood at USD 1,730 million. \This substantial trade volume underscores the robust economic ties between the two nations.

Finland followed closely as India's second-largest trading partner among the Nordic countries, with a total trade value of USD 2,024.12 million during the same period.

India's trade with Finland has witnessed significant expansion in recent years, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of approximately 10.05 per cent over the last five years.

Denmark and Norway also emerged as significant trading partners for India from the Nordic region, with bilateral trade volumes recorded at USD 1,681 million and USD 1,507 million, respectively, in the fiscal year 2022-23. *—PTI*

NAVIGATING CROSSROADS IN 2014

Global oil, mobility sectors at critical juncture

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

In 2024, the global oil and mobility sectors find themselves at a pivotal crossroads, navigating through a labyrinth of intricate geopolitical, technological, and economic dynamics.

According to S&P Global Commodity Insights, this juncture presents a moment of profound significance, as these industries confront a myriad of challenges and opportunities that are poised to redefine their very landscape. From geopolitical tensions to rapid technological advancements and shifting economic paradigms, the year ahead holds the promise of transformative change, setting the stage for a new era in the realms of oil and mobility.

The OPEC+ alliance stands at a crossroads, confronted with the challenge of navigating between curtailing oil supply to boost prices and defending market share amidst escalating conflicts and burgeoning output from the Americas.

With spare production capacity nearing 5 million b/day, particularly concentrated in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the alliance's strategic direction for 2024 remains uncertain, accentuated by Angola's departure from the group.

The US and Canada emerge as dominant players in global oil and gas production, driven by advancements in the Permian Basin, Canadian Oil Sands, and US shale gas. *—ANI*

JSW commissions 5MT hot strip mill in K'taka

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

- The facility was lit-up on 17 March, 2024, and after successful completion of trial runs and quality and delivery testing.

JSW Steel on Saturday announced commissioning of a hot strip mill at its integrated steel plant in Vijayanagar, Karnataka.

The company has also made first dispatch of steel products from the mill having an annual capacity of 5 million tonnes (MT), JSW Steel said in an exchange filing.

"JSW Vijayanagar Metallics Ltd (JVML), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the company, today successfully commissioned its hot strip mill (HSM) at Vijayanagar plant with a capacity of 5 MTPA and has made its first dispatch," the company said.

The HSM facility has the capability of manufacturing plates and coils and is equipped with advanced features such as digital reheating furnaces, evaporative cooling system and waste heat recovery system, among others.

The facility was lit-up on 17 March, 2024, and after successful completion of trial runs and quality and delivery testing, the commercial manufacturing and sales have commenced, JSW Steel said. *—PTI*

APRIL'S TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE

New tech enables blind people to hear, feel eclipse

WASHINGTON, 30 MARCH

While eclipse watchers look to the skies, people who are blind or visually impaired will be able to hear and feel the celestial event.

Sound and touch devices will be available at public gatherings on April 8, when a total solar eclipse crosses North America, the moon blotting out the sun for a few minutes.

"Eclipses are very beautiful things, and everyone should be able to experience it once in their lifetime," said Yuki Hatch, a high school senior in Austin, Texas.

Hatch is a visually impaired student and a space enthusiast who hopes to one day become a computer scientist for NASA. On eclipse day, she and her classmates at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired plan to sit outside in the school's grassy quad and listen to a small device called a LightSound box that translates changing light into sounds.

When the sun is bright, there will be high, delicate flute notes. As the moon begins to cover the sun, the mid-range notes are those of a clarinet. Darkness is rendered by a low clicking sound.

The LightSound device is the result of a collaboration between Wanda Díaz-Merced, an astronomer who is blind, and Harvard astronomer Allyson Bieryla. Díaz-Merced regularly translates her data into audio to analyse patterns for her research.

A prototype was first used during the 2017 total solar eclipse that crossed the US, and the handheld device has been used at other eclipses.

A prototype was first used during the 2017 total solar eclipse that crossed the US **PHOTO: PIXBAY**

This year, they are working with other institutions with the goal of distributing at least 750 devices to locations hosting eclipse events in Mexico, the US, and Canada. They held workshops at universities and museums to construct the devices, and provide DIY instructions on the group's website.

The Perkins Library — associated with the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts — plans to broadcast the changing tones of the LightSound device over Zoom for members to listen online and by telephone, said outreach manager Erin Fragola.

In addition to students, many of the library's senior patrons have age-related vision loss, he said.

"We try to find ways to make things more accessible for everyone," he said.

Others will experience the solar event through the sense of touch, with the Cadence tablet from Indiana's Tactile Engineering. The tablet is about the size of a cellphone with rows of dots that pop up and down. It can be used for a variety of purposes: reading Braille, feeling graphics and movie clips, playing video games. *—AP*

BIGGEST CRICKET CARNIVAL

Hyderabad's explosive form threatens Gujarat

DC needs Shaw to boost attack against formidable CSK

AHMEDABAD, 30 MARCH

A depleted Gujarat Titans bowling attack will have to raise its game by quite a few notches if it intends to stop a marauding Sunrisers Hyderabad team fresh from its record total against Mumbai Indians, in the upcoming afternoon IPL match here on Sunday.

Sunrisers are coming here on the back of breaking the ceiling for all-time IPL total when they plundered 277 against Mumbai Indians to secure their first win of the season.

First-time skipper Shubman Gill's Titans, who started with a win at home against Mumbai Indians, on the other hand, slipped in Chennai in their previous game.

The profligate Umesh Yadav is no match for the injured Mohammed Shami and that is proving to be a big factor for Titans.

The resounding 63-run defeat affected their net run rate as it plummeted to -1.425, the worst among the league's 10 teams, which could cause some problems towards the business end of the tournament. It can't be denied that losing Hardik Pandya, who lends necessary balance with his all-round skills has also been a big factor.

Winners and runners-up in the last two seasons, GT's success under Pandya has centered around one of their batter's ability to come up trumps and play a match-winning role.

Whether it's Wriddhiman Saha, David Miller, Pandya, or Rahul Tewatia, one of them has typically ignited the batting lineup. However, in the absence of the inspirational India all-rounder, their batting display appears drab and lacking its usual spark.

GT had a one-day style batting approach chasing Chennai Super Kings' imposing 207, and barring Sai Sudharsan none could reach 30s.

Delhi Capitals will be aiming to rejig their out-of-depth batting order by bringing the flamboyant Prithvi Shaw in the mix against the defending champions Chennai Super Kings in what could be safely termed as a 'battle of unequals' on Sunday's Indian Premier League encounter.

- First-time skipper Shubman Gill's Titans, who started with a win at home against Mumbai Indians

In T20 format, reputations do go for a toss but DC in their last four meetings haven't been able to get past CSK, and the margins of defeat -- 91, 27, and 77 runs respectively paint a sorry picture. One also needs to take into account that in those three heavy losses, the core of the Delhi team has been more or less the same save for their last meeting when Rishabh Pant wasn't available.

Hence a win against CSK would be considered as a big upset in the tournament.

If CSK once again looks like a team to beat with all its bases nicely covered, it has been quite the opposite for the Ricky Ponting-coached Capitals, which has been outplayed in both departments of the game.

DC's co-owners GMR and JSW have been completely messing up the team composition at the auction table itself for some years and there is hardly anything that Ponting or Director of Cricket Sourav Ganguly could do with domestic talent that lacks quality.

—*PTI*

Heinrich Klaasen and Shubman Gill- Rishabh Pant and Dhoni **PHOTO: PTI**

TODAY'S MATCH

Gujarat Titans vs Sunrisers Hyderabad

Time: 3:30 PM

Where To Watch:
Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad

TODAY'S MATCH

Chennai Super Kings vs Delhi Capitals

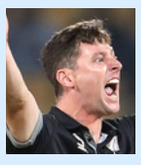
Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:
Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: ACA-VDCA International Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam

MATT HENRY REPLACES DAVID WILLEY IN THE LUCKNOW SQUAD

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH



Lucknow Super Giants on Saturday named New Zealand fast bowler Matt Henry as a replacement for England all-rounder David Willey. Henry joins LSG at his base price of Rs 1.25 crore. Willey had withdrawn from the tournament citing personal reasons. Willey joined the Super Giants through the auction last year after representing Royal Challengers Bengaluru during IPL 2022 and 2023. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sitwala, Haria enter CCI Billiards quarter-finals

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

National champions Dhruv Sitwala and Dhvaj Haria scored convincing victories to sail into the quarter-finals of the All India CCI Billiards Classic here on Saturday.Sitwala, the left-handed India No. 1, got the better of seasoned pro-Arun Agrawal 979-399, while Haria defeated last year's runner-up Rob Hall of England 1055-425.The Mumbai-based Sitwala produced a single sizeable break of 296 and had smaller runs of 60, 62, 76, 71, and 94 on the way to his win against Agrawal, while Haria constructed a high break of 399 against his pre-quarter-final opponent.The Gujarat-based Haria had two more century efforts of 159 and 131 and a couple of breaks of 85, 55, and 53. Hall, who was down with a stomach bug, could only muster breaks of 65, 80, and 94. Strong favorite and reigning champion Pankaj Advani continued to rule as he outclassed Agrawal 1236-428 to move closer to the defense of his title.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka openers make good progress in 2nd test

CHATTOGRAM, 30 MARCH

Opener Nishan Madushka scored an unbeaten half-century as Sri Lanka made a solid start to the second and final test, reaching 88-0 at lunch on Saturday. After winning the toss and opting to bat first, the tourists made a fluent start with Madushka driving pacer Syed Khaled Ahmed for a four-pass boundary in the first over. Karunaratne also began with a boundary when he clipped a full-length delivery of debutant Hasan Mahmud past mid-wicket. Bangladesh's bowlers still created some chances in the otherwise barren session but their fielders couldn't hold on to the catches. Madushka was dropped on 9 when Mahmudul Hasan put down a straightforward chance off fast bowler Mahmud at second slip.—*AP*

PHOTO: AFP

Miami Open 2024: Sinner, Dimitrov set up men's final

MIAMI, 30 MARCH

Grigor Dimitrov followed his ruthless upset of Carlos Alcaraz with another brilliant display to beat Alexander Zverev on Friday at the Miami Open and set up a summit clash with Italian Jannik Sinner, a top-5 player. With his 6-4, 6-7(4), 6-4 victory, Bulgarian Dimitrov advanced to his third ATP Masters 1000 event and his first in Miami. The result also moved Dimitrov up to No. 9 in the ATP Live Rankings, securing his return to the Top 10 in the ATP Rankings for the first time since November 2018. The gap of 260 weeks between his Top 10 standings is the third-longest in the history of the rankings. His victory set up another clash against a Top 5 opponent: Jannik Sinner awaits in Sunday's final after his 6-1, 6-2 result against Medvedev earlier on Friday.—*AP*

Krunal, Pooran lift LSG to 199/8 against Punjab Kings

LUCKNOW, 30 MARCH

Floater Krunal Pandya's late blitz powered Lucknow Super Giants to a competitive 199/8 Indian Premier League match against Punjab Kings on Saturday.

Asked to bat first, opener Quinton de Kock top-scored for LSG with a 38-ball 54 but it was stand-in skipper Nicholas Pooran's 21-ball 42, that infused life into his team's innings in the middle overs.

On the back of two sixes and four boundaries, Krunal scored at a strike rate of 200 to finish on a 22-ball 43 and give his side extra cushion.De Kock got the LSG innings underway with a splendid drive through mid-off for a boundary.

Krunal Pandya **PHOTO: AFP**

Playing the game as an 'impact player' having handed over the leadership responsibility to Nicholas Pooran, KL Rahul didn't look convincing as he tried to flick Kagiso Rabada behind square on the leg-side.

Running in from a long way, a diving Harshal Patel made a valiant attempt to latch on to the ball but Rahul was lucky as the fielder could not pull off what would have been a blinder.

At the other end, De Kock was in his element as he flayed Rabada over point for a four in the first delivery he faced from the South African speedster. Next ball de Kock did one better.

—*PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

United fights back to beat West Ham

DUBAI, 30 MARCH

Newcastle United crawled back from a 3-1 deficit to post a thrilling 4-3 win against West Ham United in a Premier League clash at St. James Park on Saturday.

Alexander Isak opened the scoring for the Magpies after converting an early penalty in the sixth minute but Michail Antonio and Mohammed Kudus scored for the Hammers as they broke for half-time with a 2-1 lead. Jarred Bowen struck early in the second half to create a two-goal advantage for West Ham.

Isak scored from the spot again in the 77th minute to reduce the deficit before Harvey Barnes scored a seven-minute brace (83rd and 90th minute) to give a 4-3 lead to the Magpies. Newcastle finished the match with 10 men after Anthony Gordon saw a red card in the fourth minute of second-half additional time. —*AP*

Harvey Barnes scored the winner for Newcastle **PHOTO: AFP**

Resilient B'luru hold Odisha to a draw

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Bengaluru FC and Odisha FC played out a goalless draw in their Indian Super League (ISL) 2023-24 encounter at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium on Saturday.

The result handed a big jolt to the Juggernauts and their hopes of clinching the League Winners Shield as they now have 36 points from 19 games, five behind what the top-placed Mumbai City FC (41) has accumulated from the same number of matches. On the other hand, Bengaluru FC is back in the top-six courtesy of the outcome of this match.

It was a day where the backlines of both the teams were the saving graces, helping them keep a clean sheet each. Goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu was solid between the posts for the home side, making multiple decisive stops that denied Odisha FC the breakthrough until the end.

Ahmed Jahouh delivered a curling ball that called for Jerry Lalrinzuala inside the box on the left flank of the final third. Gurpreet used his big frame to good effect to ensure that Jerry didn't have too much space to attempt a testing shot, thus keeping the visitors at bay in the 31st minute.

Bengaluru FC and Odisha FC played out a goalless draw **PHOTO: AFP**

Fijian forward Roy Krishna had breached past the Bengaluru FC defense to storm into their defensive half with a solo effort in the added time of the first half. His trickery with the ball and fleet-footedness ensured that he got past Gurpreet, but his attempt into an open net was thwarted by a late clearance by Shankar Sampingiraj.

Eleven minutes into the second half, Isak Vanlalruatfela and Amey Ranawade, who have taken giant leaps under the watch of Sergio Lobera at Odisha FC this season —*PTI*

AIFF member Deepak Sharma arrested

PANAJI, 30 MARCH

All India Football Federation executive committee member Deepak Sharma was arrested by Goa police on Saturday for allegedly physically assaulting two women players, an official said. Two footballers of Himachal Pradesh-based Khad FC, taking part in the Indian Women's Football (IWL) League second division here, had alleged Sharma, the owner of the club, had barged into their room and physically assaulted them on the night of 28 March. —*PTI*

Deepak Sharma was arrested by Goa police **PHOTO: PTI**

PCB wants to bring Babar back as captain

LAHORE, 30 MARCH

PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has offered Babar Azam captaincy in the white ball formats but the star player has not yet made his decision, sources have claimed.

It has been learned that Babar has set down conditions for accepting the captaincy, including having a say in the appointment of coaches. Babar has conveyed that he should given the reins of the side in all three formats.

The national selection committee, though is divided on the issue. A former Punjab caretaker minister, who has no cricketing background, is not in favor of giving back absolute power to Babar.

"Some members of the selection committee now feel the best thing is to let Shaheen Shah Afridi continue as captain for the home T20 series against New Zealand in April and give him a chance to prove his credentials," one well-informed source said.

He said there was a feeling among some selectors it would be best to wait for a series or two before taking a final decision to bring back Babar as captain. —*AP*

Babar Azam **PHOTO: AFP**

AFRIDI CONTEMPLATES QUITTING AS T20 CAPTAIN

LAHORE, 30 MARCH

Disappointed that he was not involved in discussions concerning Pakistan cricket and his future as T20 skipper, fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi is contemplating stepping down as captain.

A well-informed source close to Shaheen said that the bowler was upset that not even once the PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi or the national selectors have spoken to him about their plans as far as the captaincy or appointment of coaches is concerned.

"Shaheen is rightly upset as being the national T20 captain he expected that even if the board/selectors wanted to remove him they have the decency to also inform him of the reasons. —*AP*

T20 WORLD CUP

India's WC squad likely by the end of April

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

India's 15-member squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup in the USA and West Indies is likely to be named in the last week of April as the ICC's cut-off date for submission of teams is May 1, a BCCI source said on Saturday.

However, every participating team will get a chance to change players in their initial squad till May 25.

"The Indian team will be selected sometime during the last week of April, the time by which the first half of IPL will be over and the national selection committee will be in a position to assess the form and fitness of the contenders," the senior BCCI source told PTI on condition of anonymity.

"The first batch of cricketers will leave for New York immediately after the end of the league stage of IPL on May 19. Those players, whose teams won't qualify for the final four will be going early, like it happened during WTC finals last year," the source added.

With the tournament being held in the USA and West Indies, it is expected that a few of the stand-bys will also travel with the team so that there is no logistical nightmare in case any player from the main squad gets injured or has to pull out due to unforeseen circumstances.

—*PTI*

India's 15-member squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup **PHOTO: PTI**